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## ABSTRACT

This document contains the first eight issues of "Rural Roots"--two published in 2000 and six published bimonthly in 2001. A newsletter of the Rural School and Community Trust, "Rural Roots" provides news, information, and commentary from the Rural Trust and highlights the wide variety of place-based education work happening in rural schools and communities across the country. Articles include: "Rural School and Community Trust Gets \$8M Boost from New Foundation Grants"; "Extravaganza 2000: Networking Solutions for Rural Schools" (Elisabeth Higgins Null); "Stewardship Institute Participants Tackle Standards Issue" (Barbara Poore); "PACERS Cooperative Celebrates 'Alabama, My Home'" (Elisabeth Higgins Null); "Making the Best Better: Developing a Portfolio-Based Assessment System" (Barbara Cervone); "Rural Trust Native Sites: Paradigm Busters" (Elaine Salinas); "From Downeast to the Delta: Lubec, Maine Students Host Marine Conference"; "Youth Leadership Is Major Focus at Rendezvous 2000" (Julie Bartsch, Matt Pritchard); "Student Recording Projects Capture Rural Culture, History"; "Student-Run Grocery Store Up and Running"; "Students Map Resources of Robeson County, NC"; "Students Converge in Kearney, Nebraska for Student Extravaganza 2001"; "Arts Flourish on California's San Juan Ridge"; "Wetlands Estonia Saved by Saint Paul Senior Ecology Class"; "Murrah Reflects on Six Years of Rural Trust"; "How To Make the Outdoors Your Classroom"; "A Teacher's First Person Account of the Zia Pueblo and Peacham, Vermont Student Exchange" (Cathy Browne); "Wisconsin's Youth Press: Hands-On Media Work" (Alison Yaunches); "Cross-Cultural Orientation at Old Minto Camp" (Ray Barnhardt, Rob Amberg); "Where Does Place-Based Learning Fit In?" (Alison Yaunches); and "A Light Shining on Learning That Happens within the Context of Community" (Ginny Jaramillo). Issues also contain notices of conferences and new publications, and organizational news of the Rural Trust. (SV)

Rural Roots:  
News, Information, and Commentary  
from the Rural School and Community Trust, 2000-2001

Kathryn E. Westra and H. Alison Yaunches, Editors

Volumes 1-2

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# Rural Roots

*News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust*

## Rural Roots Debuts

With this, the first issue of *Rural Roots*, the Rural School and Community Trust launches a publication that will attempt to share the incredible variety of place-based education work that is going on around the country. Just as the Rural Trust has succeeded the Annenberg Rural Challenge, this newsletter replaces *Rural Matters*, which was published by the Rural Challenge through 1999.

The voices you will hear in these pages are those of parents, teachers, researchers, curriculum specialists, school administrators, students, and community members. Some of the stories will be about success, and some will document the many challenges that are being faced. We hope that in *Rural Roots* you will find inspiration, ideas you can use, and resources you can draw upon. And we invite you to share with us your stories, your ideas, your battles, and your teaching techniques, so that we may share them with others committed to place-based learning.

## Rural School and Community Trust Gets \$8M Boost from New Foundation Grants

*Brown Foundation Leads Way with \$6 Million Gift to Support Place-Based Education Work*

FOUNDATION GRANTS totaling \$8 million were announced in June by the Rural School and Community Trust. The largest of three major gifts was \$6 million from the Brown Foundation, Inc. of Houston. A \$1.5 million grant was given by the Lyndhurst Foundation of Chattanooga, Tennessee. The New York-based AT&T Foundation will support technology-related programs in rural schools with a \$500,000 grant. All three new grants will support the Rural Trust's work in more than 700 rural schools and communities across America.

"We are thrilled at the vote of confidence represented by these grants, and that these three foundations share our vision for strengthening rural schools and communities," said Rachel B. Tompkins, president of the Rural Trust. "Using these gifts, we will be able to build on our successes of the past five years to help create a strong, sustainable future for rural public education. With the help of the Brown, Lyndhurst, and AT&T Foundations, we hope to share

what small rural schools have to offer to American education, and spread the word that kids, engaged in a meaningful way with their communities' issues, can do great things."

The Brown Foundation gift, a general operating grant, will be given in \$2 million annual increments over the next three years. Dr. Maconda B. O'Connor, president of the Brown Foundation, said

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**Rural Datebook**

## Mark Your Calendar

"Connecting Community, Classrooms, & Curriculum" is the theme of this year's Foxfire National Conference, to be held October 13-14 in Atlanta, Georgia. Jack Shelton, director of the PACERS Cooperative in Alabama, is the keynote speaker. In addition, many teachers involved in place-based education will be involved as presenters in 20 concurrent sessions

on such subjects as technology and place-based education, understanding community through inquiry, and connecting children, classrooms, and democratic ideals. For registration information contact The Foxfire Fund, Inc., P.O. Box 541, Mountain City, GA 30562-0541; telephone (706) 746-5828; or visit the website at [www.foxfire.org](http://www.foxfire.org)

### *Rural Trust Gets \$8M Boost from New Foundation Grants*

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the Brown gift supports work that "is making a difference to students and their communities around the country. It is certainly true here in Texas, especially in some of our poorest border communities," she noted. The place-based education work supported by the Rural Trust in two of those communities, Schleicher County and the Edcouch-Elsa school district, has yielded remarkable improvement in student achievement. In Edcouch-Elsa, the number of 8th graders passing the math test on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) has climbed from 52 percent in 1995 to 95 percent in 1998. Schleicher County's 8th graders boosted passing math scores from 53.3 percent in 1995 to 100 percent in 1998. But test scores tell only part of the story. The community focus of place-based learning has given students, parents, and community members a new pride in their heritage and a new confidence in the future of their rural communities. "This work is not only about excellence in teaching, but also about sustaining these smaller learning communities," said Dr. O'Connor.

The Lyndhurst Foundation grant also is an unrestricted operating grant. "The Rural School and Community Trust is

both a timely initiative and an extraordinary opportunity for investing in education and community life in America, two of our nation's greatest challenges," said Jack Murrah, president of the Lyndhurst Foundation. "Having been involved with the Rural Trust since its beginnings, I am convinced of the importance of the work that has been done. Communities where this work is taking place are at the vanguard of a growing nationwide rural schools movement. This is why we have made a substantial commitment to support the continuing work of the Rural Trust," said Murrah.

The AT&T Foundation grant will support the technology initiatives of the Rural School and Community Trust. "I am particularly pleased to bring AT&T's support to the Trust," said John D. Zeglis, Chairman and CEO, AT&T Wireless Group. "By bringing the benefits of information technology to rural schools and communities, we can expand and strengthen the network needed to improve rural education."

With the three new grants, the Rural Trust has exceeded the matching requirement of the \$50 million challenge grant from Ambassador Walter Annenberg—the grant that originally funded the organization's work in 1995.

While the new foundation grants represent a major investment in the future of the Rural School and Community Trust, the Trust's work has been sustained for the past five years by significant com-



## Rural Roots

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September 2000

Rural Roots is published six times a year by the Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling.

Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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munity fundraising efforts, as well. "When Walter Annenberg pledged \$50 million for rural education in 1995, it was a challenge to all of us in America to change the way we think about public schools—and a challenge to back up that thinking with new sources of funding for public education. I think Ambassador Annenberg would be pleased to see that all across America, communities, businesses, individuals, school systems, local, regional, and national foundations have joined him in his commitment to support rural public schools," said Rural Trust president Tompkins.





PHOTO BY KIRBY MOUSEL

*Students from Wakefield Community School renovate an old round barn—one of the many student projects highlighted at Extravaganza 2000.*

## Extravaganza 2000: Networking Solutions for Rural Schools

*by Elisabeth Higgins Null  
Rural Trust Communications Staff*

**W**HEN MEMBERS of the student organizing committee of Extravaganza 2000 gathered in Kearney, Nebraska, on Saturday, March 25, to stuff registration packets and prepare name badges, most of them met each other for the first time. Until then, they had been a virtual committee representing five small South Dakota and Nebraska high schools. For six months, they had e-mailed, faxed, and chatted by phone as they coordinated what would become the largest student conference ever held on place-based education. Each had been responsible for a part of the planning. Now, as if piecing together a large quilt, the committee was stitching the handiwork of many others into a bigger pattern.

The event, called "Small Towns—Big Dreams," was held in Kearney on March 27–28, and was the third Student Extravaganza organized entirely by students in South Dakota and Nebraska. Earlier Extravaganzas in 1998 and 1999 attracted 183 and 413 participants, respectively. This year's celebration of place-based student work attracted 600 students and their teachers. The adults were the observers at this conference. From organization to presentations, the success of the conference belonged to the

hundreds of elementary, middle, and secondary school students in attendance.

Five small rural high schools—Elm Valley, Estelline, and Willow Lake in South Dakota and Hay Springs and Ord in Nebraska—were involved in planning the Extravaganza. Each school was responsible for specific aspects of the conference. The student committee representing all five schools solicited presentation proposals from rural schools across the country affiliated with the Rural School and Community Trust and its

grantee organizations. The committee asked students from different regions to share the ways they had enriched their education while responding to a variety of local needs.

Students from Estelline High School reviewed and chose the presentations, casting aside any that depended too heavily on teachers and their input. This was, after all, a student conference. Elm Valley created the program book and worked on scheduling events. Hay Springs put together the entertainment, persuading the Marcy Brothers, a local band now working in Nashville, to perform their rousing songs of rural affirmation for the Monday night banquet. Ord, co-hosting the Extravaganza with Willow Lake, coordinated the complicated logistics of the conference. Teachers Robi Kroger (Ord) and Junia Meyer (Willow Lake) joined veteran Extravaganza adviser Curt Shaw of the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative as mentors and advisers to the student organizers.

Willow Lake High School took on a special role: to help students define the social and economic problems facing rural communities and to think creatively about possible solutions. Early last fall, Willow Lake students began sending monthly packets of select articles to about 60 schools across the country for reading and discussion in preparation for the Extravaganza. Students wrote poems and essays in response to the articles. These, too, were disseminated and discussed. At the Extravaganza, Willow Lake students presided over a series of workshops in which students (divided into teams and using questionnaires to facilitate discussion) further explored rural issues covered by the readings. The results of the small-group discussions were then presented to the larger group.

Altogether, Extravaganza 2000 hosted 96 presentations designed by and for students. As student presentations got under way, it was clear that the participants not only took an active interest in one another's work, but also were delighted to find similarities between their own projects and those of other rural communities, some of them far away. A high

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"Consultancy triads" helped Stewardship Institute participants share dilemmas and get advice from their peers. Pictured here, left to right, are Jo Hardin of the Walden's Ridge Cluster in Oakdale, Tenn.; Mel Friedman of the South Monterey Partnership in Carmel, Calif.; and Alice Aud of the League of Professional Schools in Sylvania, Ga.

## Stewardship Institute Participants Tackle Standards Issue

by Barbara Poore  
Director of Field Services  
Rural School and Community Trust

The field work of the Rural School and Community Trust has been built on the belief that local schools and communities engaged in place-based education have a considerable amount of expertise among them. They are not so much in need of an expert from the outside as they are a skilled facilitator who can broker resources, network them to others, and provide timely and appropriate learning experiences.

In the Rural Trust we call these individuals "stewards." A steward is a helper, a listener, a questioner, a prodder, an encourager. They work closely with sites, always respecting the local knowledge and culture and carefully judging how best to help move the work in a given place in a positive direction. They share their knowledge with each other and they arrange opportunities for sites to share together. Their goal is to continually involve more local people who can be stewards, as well.

One of the best opportunities for shared learning is the annual Stewardship Institute. Each Institute focuses on a topic that has broad local relevance in rural communities, yet is national in scope. This year's Institute was held at

Callaway Gardens in Georgia on March 2-4. It brought together 120 teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, and Rural Trust staff to discuss "Meeting and Exceeding State Standards through Place-Based Learning."

### "Consultancy Triads"

The dialogue at the Institute was intense, because the premise of the meeting was that there is a great deal of expertise to be shared, and many common struggles to be addressed. Several ways to share were provided. The first of these was a "consultancy triad" modeled on the Coalition of Essential Schools' National Re-Learning Faculty Program, and further adapted and revised as part of the work of the Annenberg Institute's National School Reform Faculty Project. Participants were divided into groups of three, with each of three partners sharing a dilemma and offering feedback to one another.

This year, as in the past, the consultancy triads offered partners a chance to establish close collegial relationships that offer support and problem-solving help long after the Institute ends. One participant commented: "I could not believe the outpouring of ideas from my triad. I have twenty plus written ideas that are doable. I am so grateful and excited with the possibilities."

continued on next page

## A Creative Approach to Learning

by Sharon R. Jones, Assistant Principal  
East Feliciana Parish School System  
Clinton, Louisiana

This past March, I was given the opportunity to attend the Rural School and Community Trust's Stewardship Institute in Pine Mountain, Georgia. It was a new and exciting experience for me.

During the conference, we were all given the opportunity to assemble together in both large and small groups. These groups helped define the purpose of the program, as well as providing a time for sharing some of the successes and challenges the participants

faced at their various home sites.

I became more knowledgeable about place-based learning, which is simply defined as extending the student learning process beyond the traditional four walls of the classroom and into the community.

The benefits attached to this program are blessings in disguise for geographic communities. Students will be given the opportunity to learn about the places in which they live, and to receive a support system through community leaders. I came away believing more than ever that knowledge of one's community creates a love and appreciation for its future.

## Stewardship Institute

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### Building Community

The second method of sharing was through small groups—teams of 8–10 people who focused their attention on specific aspects of the Institute topic and then reported on their deliberations to the entire group.

Finally, the Institute included a community-building aspect, giving participants a sense that their individual work is anchored into something bigger. This sense of community enhances the learning experience by forging powerful and meaningful connections to others who care about similar things.

One participant summed up the Institute this way, "It was the best! It was so interesting to see and feel the warmth, dedication, and energy/synergy, and to come away with some real actions to hit the ground running upon return to my place."

### Continuing Connections

People come to the Stewardship Institute expecting to learn new things that facilitate their work back home. They leave with an understanding that they, too, are now stewards of the work with a responsibility to spread this assistance to

others. Whether by presentations, consulting, or networking, each finds his or her own best way to spread the work and the word about place-based learning.

The connections made at the Stewardship Institute often result in ongoing communication between sites, as well. This is made possible through electronic networking such as web board discussions and listserves, and also through exchange visits. Local teams often connect with others whose work is so similar that they decide, with the help of their national staff steward, to do an on-site visit for a more intensive exchange.

Stewardship Institutes may also be the first opportunity that some people have to connect to their regional organization. They learn about the meetings and workshops that are offered within their region when they meet their near neighbors at national institutes. This connection helps them to become active in the regional group and make contributions there, as well. Participants in the March Institute on standards and place based learning already are making plans to share what they learned with their regional groups in the coming months.

*For a report on the March 2–4 Institute, or to receive information on upcoming Stewardship Institutes, please contact the Rural School and Community Trust national office at (202) 955-7177.*

## Extravaganza 2000

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school student from Walden's Ridge Cluster in Tennessee talked to a middle school student from Boonville, California, about their mutual interest in oral history, and was excited when he heard about the California school's efforts to turn student oral history interviews into a book and CD. "We could do that!" he exclaimed. Other students found distant counterparts who shared a common interest in watershed issues, community performances, traditional arts and crafts, or rural economic development. Young entrepreneurs compared notes on business development, bookkeeping, and marketing.

During the final conference luncheon, former University of Nebraska football

coach and current Republican congressional candidate Tom Osborne urged conference attendees to nurture the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of their personalities and to become role models to other high school students. Rural Trust President Rachel Tompkins praised the students for the important work they were doing in their schools and communities, and reminded them of how much strength and energy they had to offer. "Do you know how much power you have when you put heart and mind and energy and time, which is precious, behind something of use to your community?" she asked. Both speakers received standing ovations.

*For more details on Student Extravaganza presentations, see our website at [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org), and click on the Project of the Month under "What's New."*

## New Publications Available

The following new publications are available from the Rural School and Community Trust.

*Small Works: School Size, Poverty, and Student Achievement* is a report on research released in February 2000. Researchers Craig Howley and Robert Bickel analyzed data from urban, suburban, and rural public schools in Georgia, Montana, Ohio, and Texas. Their conclusion is that smaller schools reduce the harmful effects of poverty on student achievement by as much as 70 percent. Free.

*Assessment Monograph: A Special Report to the Rural School and Community Trust* was prepared by the Rural Trust's evaluation team at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This 73-page guide discusses the limitations of standardized testing in evaluating student progress, and offers alternative methods to assess project- and place-based student work. \$10 includes shipping.

*Learning In Place* is also a product of the evaluation team at Harvard. Using case studies of more than a dozen place-based education programs, this 69-page guide can help those interested in starting or improving similar programs in their own schools. \$10 includes shipping.

*Standards in Public Schools: A Policy Statement of the Rural School and Community Trust* articulates the Trust's views on academic standards, with particular emphasis on the role of community input in setting and maintaining standards. Ann C. Lewis, columnist for *KAPPAN* magazine, called this policy statement "one of the finest philosophical documents to come out of the standards movement." Free.

*For copies of publications, contact Kelly Matthews, Rural School and Community Trust, 808 17th St., NW, Suite 220, Washington, DC 20006.*





The steps of the state capitol in Montgomery, Alabama, were the setting for a celebration of the state's small schools and communities.

## PACERS Cooperative Celebrates "Alabama, My Home"

by Elisabeth Higgins Null  
Rural Trust Communications Staff

On April 27-29, as Southerners debated whether or not to remove Confederate flags from their state capitols, a different engagement with the past was taking place on the state capitol grounds in Montgomery, Alabama. Here, in what was once the Confederacy's seat of government, an integrated throng of schoolchildren, parents, and teachers—African-American, white, and Hispanic—strolled through exhibits of student photography, art and poetry; crowded into symposia and drama presentations; caucused informally under white tents on the lawn; and sang along at concerts presented with all the fervor of a revival meeting. They had come to take part in Alabama's first statewide celebration of rural life—"Alabama My Home: A Celebration of Small Schools and Communities" sponsored by the PACERS Small Schools Cooperative.

The people here, gathered together from many of Alabama's smallest schools and towns, have discovered ways of using history as an inspirational starting point for many rural revitalization efforts. Sharing their stories about the past has drawn diverse area residents together around mutually held and publicly af-

firmed values. At the PACERS celebration, they were convening to share student art fashioned from oral histories collected by the students themselves. They also were sharing ways for students to develop academic skills while improving life in their often economically-impo-  
verished communities.

Attendees found common ground with others from every region of the state. Whatever their differences, they were deeply committed to education and to sustaining the positive cultural values they themselves associated with rural life in the South. "This is where I've come to recharge my batteries," said one teacher. "I can learn from what other people are doing in similar circumstances. Most of us want similar things and can work together if we just get beyond the things that keep us apart."

The PACERS cooperative launched "Alabama My Home" in order to showcase the community-based work of students in its affiliated schools, to develop promising educational initiatives, and to provide a convivial forum for teachers and community members to trade ideas and experiences. More than an educational reform group, PACERS describes itself in its statement of purpose as originally organized "to sustain small schools and their communities." Over time it has

discovered, however, that such work has a significant impact on "economic power, democracy, appropriate technology, and other issues that confront all of society." While PACERS initially conceived of itself as a means of supporting the ideas and energy of local teachers and students, it is increasingly attracting state and national attention.

PACERS supports efforts to link schools to their locales. It helps people create systemic change while reinvigorating the local institutions that keep communities alive. PACERS' message is at once profoundly conservative (to strengthen and conserve the traditional institutions of rural America) and radical (to involve rural people and their communities in a powerful effort to exert democratic initiative and economic power in determining the course of their future).

The faith that each person, child or adult, matters, and that each of us has a right and duty to be heard, places PACERS squarely in the center of a historical movement as poignantly memorialized in the structures and monuments of Montgomery as the Confederacy itself: the civil rights movement. PACERS chose to open its celebration with a lecture by the Rev. Will Campbell, a Southern Baptist preacher, a proponent of the Montgomery bus boycott, and the only white participant in the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Campbell is connected through his writings and associations with Providence Farm, an interracial tenant farmers cooperative that flourished in Holmes County, Mississippi, until the 1954 Supreme Court ruling against school segregation forced the cooperative's activists to flee mounting local hostility. In calling itself a cooperative, PACERS consciously identifies itself with a grassroots historical tradition of black and white Southerners working together to improve rural life for all.

Throughout the weekend, children assembled on indoor and outdoor stages to sing the songs they fashioned, with help from educational troubadour Larry Long, from the stories and reminiscences of local elders. Through a partnership between PACERS' Music Project and his own Community Celebration of Place, Long has worked with teachers and stu-

PHOTO BY BARBARA CERVO



dents in several rural Alabama school districts to develop a shared corpus of songs about local heroes and role models. These songs pay tribute to the lives of people of all races who might otherwise be lost to historical memory.

Students, who interviewed local elders and transformed their lives into songs, regularly perform their compositions at PACERS gatherings. In most cases, these songs were premiered at concerts in their home communities, organized to honor local elders and to draw together a cross-section of local musical talent. As students have grown up with their songs, they have passed them along to the larger community of PACERS-affiliated schools. Adults derive at least as much meaning from the songs as their younger authors and performers. A few

find space and technical support through the Program for Rural Services and Research. PACERS differs from other educational reform and advocacy groups in that its work is rooted primarily in community organizing. Its primary objective is to elicit what rural communities want and to help those communities achieve their self-defined goals.

Over the course of the weekend, the community organizing skills of not only the PACERS staff but also the school and community participants were much in evidence. Presentations and discussions, formal and informal, emphasized the processes of building bridges between disparate interests and finding out how different factions can rally together. This bridge-building has special significance for communities accustomed for genera-

them learn the same skills he acquired through PACERS while connecting them with a readership larger than that of the small towns in which they live.

Another PACERS program is a statewide Rural Health Inventory Project to collect and publish (in the community newspapers run by PACERS students) important information on rural public health issues—information that frequently gets lost in larger statistical aggregates. The project began in the early 1990s in response to a widely voiced concern expressed by rural Alabama teachers who wanted to know more about the health of their students and the communities in which they lived. This year, 20 schools will question approximately 2,500 students, using a 113-question survey developed by students and teachers with help from professional medical researchers. Students who administer the survey receive training in developing and analyzing statistics and using statistical software. As the result of this work, some of the students have become adept science writers who now write regularly and well on a variety of community health issues.

The PACERS staff, led by Jack Shelton at the University of Alabama's Program for Rural Services and Research, see themselves less as educational experts than as facilitators. Teachers and parents at the "Alabama My Home" celebration were vocal in their enthusiasm for the staff and expressed gratitude for the support PACERS offers them in achieving their own goals. Without the hierarchical relationships that often exist between teachers and school administrators, PACERS participants and staff members seem collaborative and almost familial. They have been through a lot together, and their ties run deep.

PACERS seems to be less an organization than a process or movement in which all players express pride of participation and even a sense of ownership. In this very notion of a "small schools cooperative," an inspiring historical movement from the South's rural past extends itself into the present as Alabama's small schools and small communities struggle to shape a better future for themselves and their children.

For more information on PACERS, see their website: [www.pacers.org](http://www.pacers.org)



*Student performances of songs about community heroes were a highlight of the PACERS gathering.*

of the older folk whose life stories have been woven into the music were at the PACERS celebration, as were some of their descendants.

The PACERS schools and those who teach in them believe that vibrant rural communities must nourish a rich local artistic culture. Just as students can work to improve the water supply (as they have done in more than one rural Alabama school district), they can also contribute to their communities' most deeply cherished symbols and systems of shared meaning. In tapping the wellsprings of local history, students transform local experience into community art and, in doing so, discover that their small towns are profoundly interesting places.

PACERS is cosponsored by ACCESS, a nonprofit rural school and community support organization, and the University of Alabama, which also provides of-

tions to separating residents by the color of their skin.

Among the many PACERS projects showcased at "Alabama My Home" was a Book Show and Drama program that enhances literacy by fusing drama, literature, and other expressive arts together in student projects that result in a finished publication or production. Also featured were the many community newspapers, published and run by students, in Alabama's small towns. One of PACERS' many success stories, Fred Fluker, learned all aspects of newspaper production—shooting photos, writing editorials, coordinating production, and laying out pages—in high school. Just graduated with a degree in journalism from the University of Alabama, Fluker now mentors PACERS students and dreams of launching a magazine by and for young African-Americans, helping



## Rural Roots

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### *Hot Topic: Rural Trust Gets \$8M Grant Boost—See Page 1*

## The Sky's No Limit for Anderson Valley Students

Elementary school students from Anderson Valley, California, beat out more than 1,000 other contestants to sweep the top awards in this year's Earth & Sky International Young Producers Contest. An annual event sponsored by the "Earth & Sky" radio series and the National Science Foundation, the contest requires students to produce a 90-second radio program about any science topic. Fourth-graders Juan Perez and Ras Smith secured the Grand Prize, a \$500 savings bond each, for their show entitled "Hydropower." Fourth-graders Cora Hubbert and Amanda Haydon won First Place, a \$250 savings bond each, for their show on "Solar Flares." And fifth-graders Griffin Triplet and Matty Mitchell won Honorable Mention, a plaque and a place on the Earth & Sky web site for their show, called "Tsunamis, Waves of Death."

The Anderson Valley students, who are part of the North Coast Rural Challenge Network, researched their 90-second seg-

*Ras Smith and Juan Perez  
won the Grand Prize in the  
Earth & Sky International  
Young Producers Contest.*



ments with the help of community volunteers who are experts on various scientific topics. The students then wrote, rehearsed and recorded their scripts. They used sophisticated digital recording equipment and editing software to produce their broadcast-quality shows. These completed segments were played on the local county public radio station, KZYX, for all to hear. Copies of the tapes were sent to the Earth & Sky headquarters in Texas, where the entries were judged on accuracy, originality, and clarity.

Grand Prize winner Juan Perez says the help he received from community members in preparing the show was very important. Cora Hubbert would advise another student attempting a radio show for the first time to "not expect to win anything, because you just might not . . . it's to have the experi-

ence of doing it, not the prize at the end." For Amanda Haydon, who shared First Place honors with Hubbert, the biggest challenge was "going on the internet and finding things . . . and [then] narrowing it down." Ras Smith would tell other students attempting to make such a radio show to "pick a topic that involved their lives."

Anderson Valley students have entered the contest since it began six years ago. Out of the seven entrees produced by Anderson Valley students this year, three were winners. The Grand Prize and First Place winners were aired world-wide during the week of May 8. The winning shows also are archived on the Earth & Sky website: [www.earthsky.com](http://www.earthsky.com)



# Rural Roots

*News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust*

## Rural Trust Native Sites: Paradigm Busters

*by Elaine Salinas, Rural Trust Steward*

For the past three years, the Rural Trust's Native American sites (Alaskan Federation of Natives, Navajo Nation, and Santa Fe Indian School) have been preparing for the time when they would share their unique approaches and collective learning with other Native educators from across the country. The 31st Annual Conference of the National Indian Education Association, held in late October in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, provided the perfect venue for this sharing.

Some 3,500 Native Peoples of all ages and tribal backgrounds attended the conference, which focused on "Tribal Traditions and Technology . . . Our Pathway to the 21st Century." For two days prior to the gathering, the

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## Making the Best Better: Developing a Portfolio-based Assessment System

*by Barbara Cervone, Director*

*Rural School and Community Trust Evaluation Program, Harvard University*

Am I a good parent? A good daughter to my own mother? A success at work? We routinely, if informally, take stock of how we're doing on various fronts of our lives. We each have our own definitions of what a good parent, or child, or professional does, along with our own yardsticks for measuring. At one end of the stick lies our own image of perfection (maybe the loving, nurturing, yet firm parent) and at the other, a clear picture of the unacceptable and unworthy (perhaps the scapegoating supervisor who blames her workers for her own negligence).

As we go about our days, we tally our successes and shortcomings, items big and small: holding the line on our teen-aged son's curfew, making the impossible deadline at work, canceling the last two lunches with Mom. Prompted by an incident that tests our view of ourselves—an argument or misunderstanding, a lapse in consistency, an oversight—we replay the moment, searching for evidence of strengths and weaknesses that move us back and forth along our personal measuring stick. Once we've come

to judgment, we may pat ourselves on the back or swallow the requisite regret while resolving to do better the next time.

What makes this routine stock-taking so hard is the very variety in our individual beliefs about what constitutes strength or success, weakness or failure. Take parenting, for example. How do we pinpoint exactly what a good parent does? To what extent do we balance the

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## Rural Trust Native Sites

from page 1

Rural Trust Native sites met to discuss and prepare a series of four panel presentations. The presentations were sequenced to cover key features of the work occurring in the sites and included panelists from each of the three sites. All were based on the shared belief that the transformation of Indian education will only be realized through a return to the culturally embedded education that was practiced by Native Peoples prior to the imposition of Western paradigms of education.

The first presentation, entitled "Teaching Through Indigenous Cultures: A Return to Native Ways of Knowing and Teaching," focused on the philosophical frameworks for the activity occurring across the sites. Panelists spoke to the importance of recognizing that Native Peoples had a highly successful model for the education of their children that predated white contact. This model was based in the worldview, culture, and values of Native Peoples and was the predecessor of what we, in the Rural Trust, have

and proclaim that this is "Indian education." This workshop offered the alternative view that Indian education must be both content and practice driven—"teaching *through* rather than just *about* indigenous cultures."

The third workshop, "I Am, I Said: Creating Educational Standards That Honor and Respect Native Identity," explored the unique ways that Rural Trust Native sites have integrated their cultural values and frameworks to affirm and celebrate Native identity while meeting and exceeding the academic standards set by their states. This workshop focused on the relationship between self-image and learning efficacy and the historic denial of this relationship in the practice of Indian education. The workshop title offered by Oscar Kawagley, a leader of the Alaskan project and fan of Neil Diamond, reflects the need to reclaim and proclaim Native identity in order to remake education into a "healing" experience for Native peoples.

The final workshop presentation, "On the Road to A Culturally Responsive, Community-Based School," discussed the challenges of systemic change and the sustainability of the work begun in the Rural Trust Native sites and other schools/communities across the country. In combination, the Rural Trust and the Rural Systemic Initiative

brings together indigenous educators from throughout the world every three years.

All of the workshops sponsored by the Rural Trust at this year's NIEA Conference were well-attended and the evaluations were superior. There was particular interest from a large delegation of Native Hawaiian people who attended every workshop and shared their own experiences and perspectives. It was obvious from the reception the workshops received that there is both a strong imperative and hunger for change in Indian education. As anticipated, the Rural Trust Native sites did an outstanding job of whetting all of our appetites.

***Native Peoples had a highly successful model for the education of their children . . . It was a system of education that honored and respected the interdependent relationships between all living things.***

come to call "place-based" education. It was a system of education that honored and respected the interdependent relationships between all living things.

"Education Centered in Culture & Community: Examples From the Field" was the second workshop offering. This presentation introduced the themes and teaching styles employed in schools that embrace a return to Native Ways of Knowing and Teaching. The Native traditions of "giving back" to Tribe and community, and "elders as wisdom-keepers" were discussed along with techniques used for integrating these concepts into teaching and learning. Inclusion of this workshop theme was pivotal because it has become commonplace in Indian education to add Indian topic area courses to the regular curriculum

have invested large sums of money to create real and long-lasting change in the education of Indian children. The Rural Trust sites and audience participants discussed strategies for continuing this work and extending its impact beyond existing sites and current funding cycles. Specific strategies included a focus on the design and implementation of pre-service teacher training programs to include the concepts of "place-based learning" and "Teaching Through Indigenous Cultures." Other suggestions included the establishment of a Rural Trust Native Sites Working Group which would be charged with responsibility for ongoing promotion and networking of these concepts both nationally and internationally through the World's Indigenous Peoples Education Conference, which



## Rural Roots

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Rural Roots is published six times a year by the Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling.

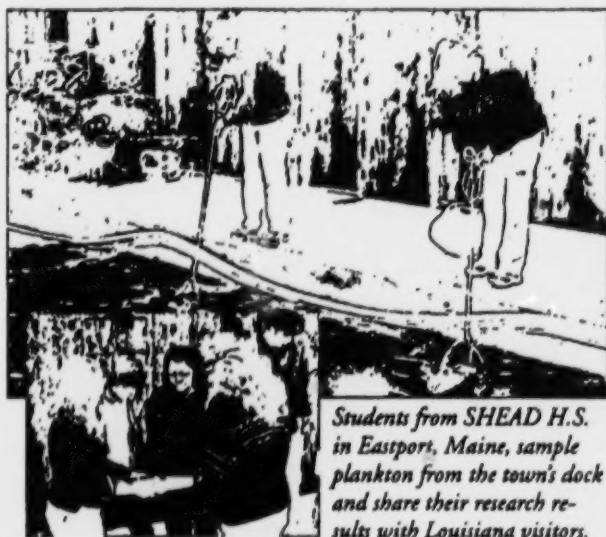
Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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PHOTOS BY KNIGHT BOODY

Students from SHEAD H.S. in Eastport, Maine, sample plankton from the town's dock and share their research results with Louisiana visitors.

## From Downeast to the Delta: Lubec, Maine Students Host Marine Conference

More than 150 students, teachers, administrators, and community members gathered in Eastport, Maine, in October for the Second Annual International Student Conference. Students

from Lubec High School organized this year's conference around the theme of "Connecting Community and Education."

At the conference, students from a number of different schools throughout Maine, as well as a team from the North Coast Rural Challenge Network in Mendocino County, California, made presentations describing various aquaculture and marine initiatives that are impacting their local economies and enriching the school curriculum. A team of five from the East Feliciana Parish in Louisiana spent several days in Maine, not only attending the conference, but visiting schools and learning about the hands-on, entrepreneurial approach to science education that has earned Lubec students and their teachers broad community support for their innovative work.

Presentations at the conference included students from Shead High School in Eastport describing their water quality and a project to monitor phytoplankton; East Machias students talking about water quality monitoring in the East Machias watershed; and a boat trip across Cobscook Bay to the Lubec aquaculture center and greenhouse, where students use wastewater from their fish-farming project to raise hydroponic vegetables. The Mendocino team shared their experiences producing a Tidepool Guide for visitors to the Mendocino area.

## From Maine to Mendocino: Reflections of a Student and a Teacher

by Daniel Williford, Biology Teacher, Mendocino Unified School District, and Corina Marks, 11th Grade Student, Mendocino USD

The parallels between Downeast Maine and the Mendocino Coast of California run deeper than the beautiful rugged coastline. The small population, the distance from a major city, and the natural resource-based economy are all similarities that these rural areas share.

As these characteristics are so intertwined, the public school education of the students in these communities faces the same incredible challenges. A question that arose as we attended the marine resources conference in Eastport, Maine, was: "How are we actively engaging our students in a real-life, project-based learning curriculum that is both meaningful and applicable to their future?"

Attending this conference was an amazing experience for both of us, as well as the 150 or so other attendees. It was amazing in the sense that here we had a group of schools actively facing these challenges in the hopes of truly educating their students in a place-based and career-oriented fashion,

while covering the academic necessities for graduation and for work at a university.

Some of the projects that commanded our attention were the various aquaculture endeavors, the living history/environmental fair put on by high school students, and the research on the relationship of phytoplankton to the health of the local economy.

Here on the Mendocino Coast we are faced with similar obstacles. How can we replace our local and dwindling natural resource-based economy with something forward-looking that will appeal to our students and our community and actually make a lasting difference? What we learned here was that we are taking steps in the right direction. By creating a curriculum that is place-based, project-based, and experiential, we have taken the step for students to truly become involved in their communities.

Both of us felt that this conference was an excellent learning experience. It was interesting to hear what other small schools are doing to conserve, connect, and unify their communities. The enthusiasm and involvement to spread and share environmental awareness was an inspiration to us all.

# Youth Leadership Is Major Focus at Rendezvous 2000

by Julie Bartsch, Rural Trust Steward and Matt Pritchard,  
Youth Leadership Participants

photos by Rob Amberg for the Rural School and Community Trust

The gavel raps on the desk. Student Matt Pritchard calls the meeting of the Wise County School Board to order. As he looks around the room he realizes this is no traditional school board, but one composed of actively involved students and community members, all carrying the right to vote. This visioning exercise, which took place in July as part of the Rural School and Community Trust's "Rendezvous 2000" in Flagstaff, Arizona, represents the Rural Trust's belief that young people should have meaningful input into all decisions affecting school and community life.

This past July, more than 60 students gathered along with some 200 educators, parents, community members, and Rural Trust staff from 34 states for the three-day Rendezvous. A youth leadership forum made up a significant part of the program, and provided a wonderful opportunity for young people from across rural America to join in discussions on rural issues, the responsibilities of youth to their communities, and strategies to make the youth voice listened to and respected in efforts to build healthy and sustainable communities. Youth and adults participated in role-playing, brainstorming, self-evaluation, and articulating personal commitments to take back to their sites. Students and adults worked as equal partners, using the forum as a model for future endeavors.

Much of the 10-15 hour youth leadership session was dedicated to outlining a set of beliefs about what schools and communities would look like if the energy, talent, and creativity of youth were tapped. Students agreed on six principles necessary in reaching this vision:

1. **Student Work**—is intellectually powerful, holds personal meaning, and is related to "real life."
2. **Expectations**—student energy, talent, and creativity are viewed as essential resources in addressing school/community issues and improving the quality of life for all.
3. **Involvement**—students are engaged

in work that has meaning and utility for their community.

4. **Decision-making**—students have meaningful input in all decisions affecting school and community life.

5. **Equity**—all students, regardless of circumstances (economic, cultural, religious, title, gender) are recognized and valued in the process of improving their schools and communities.

6. **Development**—students possess the skills, confidence, and desire to be actively involved in shaping their school and community. Adults and students need training in how to create meaningful partnerships.

Early in the session, each participant was asked to stand on a line—representing various stages of progress in achieving these six principles—in the place where they felt their school was along the continuum of reaching the goals listed above. The line went from sites just beginning to realize the capacities of young people, to those where young people are involved in all facets of community-building. Many students saw their schools as somewhere in the middle, as expressed by the students from Mariposa, California, where "youth are encouraged to a certain extent, but they aren't always valued. We

are still trying to sell the concept of 'youth as resources.' There is room to grow but it will take a lot of dedication." Many of the youth leadership participants expressed a need to reach and utilize far more students than are currently involved through student councils.

For many students who have been involved in the Rural Trust since its early days as the Annenberg Rural Challenge, the Rendezvous youth leadership sessions represented the culmination of years of effort to increase student influence in the education system, rural communities, and the work of the Rural School and Community Trust. Many—including student keynote speakers Nathan Bruggink from Hayden, Colorado; San Juanita ("Janey") Lazo from Edcouch, Texas; and Katie Sidler from Cottonwood Falls, Kansas—shared their personal stories about how Rural Trust work in their community has provided an opportunity for students generally not selected for leadership roles to get involved. For students like Teddy Ortiz from Ventura County, California, who was attending a Rural Trust gather-

*The forum "gave me strategies that I can take back to my class/school. I couldn't believe how much we had in common."*

—Student Teddy Ortiz, Ventura County, California

ing for the first time, the forum "gave me strategies that I can take back to my class/school. I couldn't believe how much we had in common."

Students agreed that the commitment by the Rural Trust's Board to incorporate youth leadership as a critical component of the organization's work is a unique opportunity. They hope to organize a 15-20 person steering committee or "National Youth Leaders Forum" representing young people from across the country to bring continuity and leverage to the work already going on in various sites. The initial task of this group will be to articulate a plan for leadership development (youth and adults) at the local, regional, and national levels. Matt Pritchard hopes the future work of the National Youth Leaders Forum "will be an essential asset to Rural Trust work around the nation and make a great impact on the landscape of 21st-century education."



Ruben Ortiz of New Mexico shared his feelings about the youth leadership session in the final moments of the Rendezvous by thanking the Rural Trust for including him in such an "awesome" experience. "In the beginning I worried about fitting in," said Ruben, "but almost immediately I realized that we had so much in common . . . that we were all working to make our community better. Back home it's easy to

get *desanimado* [discouraged] when only a handful of kids and adults will work on projects, but coming to the Rendezvous energizes you because you meet kids from across the country that are also working to make their schools and communities better. It gives you encouragement and lots of ideas to take back!"

And Ruben did just that. He went back home to Las Vegas, New Mexico,

and told everyone about the Rendezvous. His family and friends told him to "keep on at it." So he is busy working on a mural project in his town that tells the history of the community. Ruben says that when it's finished, children won't have to just learn history in their books, but will see the rich history of the Las Vegas community everywhere. That's youth leadership!

### *Clockwise from center:*

*Rendezvous participants were treated to Navajo fry bread, native crafts, and a dance presentation by a troupe of young Navajo dancers at one of the evening banquets.*

*Wisconsin teacher James Lewicki (left) chats with Rural Trust President Rachel Tompkins. Lewicki chaired the Rendezvous program committee.*

*Sharon Jones of East Feliciana Parish in Louisiana inspired conference participants with her singing.*

*San Juanita ("Janey") Lazo of the Llano Grande Center in Edcouch, Texas, was one of several student keynote speakers.*

*Mexican-American culture was highlighted at an evening fiesta, with young dancers demonstrating the traditions of various Mexican and Southwestern states.*

*The Rendezvous provided opportunities for adults and students to work together on place-based education issues of concern to all.*

*A Native American "learning community" was moderated by Rural Trust Steward Elaine Salinas. The work of participants has led to the creation of a new Native American Working Group to address Native education issues in the Rural Trust.*



## Rural Trust Principles

A keystone to the work of developing portfolio-based assessments is a set of principles describing what the best place-based learning looks like. These principles are the result of extensive conversations among the Rural Trust staff, Board of Trustees, and affiliated sites. They form the basis for ongoing efforts to assess the progress of our work.

1. Students do sustained academic work that draws upon and contributes to the place in which they live.

2. Guided by teachers and other adults, students practice new skills and responsibilities, serving as scholars, workers, and citizens in their community.

3. The community supports students and teachers in these new roles.

4. Enthusiasm for place-based education spreads as the learning deepens, steadily involving more students, teachers, administrators, and volunteers.

5. Schools mirror the democratic values they seek to instill, arranging their resources so that every child is known well, and every child's participation—regardless of ability—is needed and wanted.

6. Decisions about the education of the community's children are shared, informed by expertise both in and outside school.

7. All participants, including teachers, students, and community members, expect excellent effort from each other and review their joint progress regularly and thoughtfully.

8. Multiple measures and public input enlarge student assessments.

9. The school and community actively collaborate to make the local place a good one in which to live and work.

### Making the Best Better from page 1

model set by our parents with our own views? Is consistency a virtue or do varying circumstances—and different children—require variable behaviors? What counts as evidence? Do we measure our performance as parents by our own actions or those of our children? In what proportions? No less confounding is the question of who is a fair judge. Our kids or spouse? Our parents or in-laws? Ourselves?

Taking the pulse of place-based learning in Rural Trust sites is every bit as complicated as assessing our performance as parents.

In the case of the Rural Trust, this sizing up demands a shared vision and language—a set of principles—for what we're striving to do. (*The first Rural Trust principle, for example, maintains: Students do sustained academic work that draws upon and contributes to the place in which they live.*) We also need a common yardstick—a rubric—to measure progress towards this vision, along with clear understandings about what constitutes evidence of progress. (*Sticking with the first Rural Trust principle, to what extent, in fact, are students doing academic work that pairs rigor with relevance? What's the proof?*) A strategy for collecting and organizing this evidence—a portfolio—is essential.

If the review process is to be consensual, moreover, it must have ways—what educators like to call protocols—for inviting input from a variety of people. If it is to be constructive, there must be a process for using the results to strengthen what's working and change what's not. (*For example, What steps do we need to take to insure that our school's English teachers actively help students prepare a position paper on local land use as part of a social studies project?*) And finally, if this brand of stock-taking is to win support with community constituents, national funders and policy makers, it must be persuasive.

These were the challenges the Rural Trust faced when it embarked last spring down the path of portfolio assessments. At a meeting in March, representatives from 12 pilot sites and the evaluation team from Harvard hammered out a preliminary set of seven Rural Trust prin-

ciples, along with a rubric that measured sites' progress towards each principle on a scale of one to five. In July, these same sites gathered again to present the portfolios they had compiled during the intervening months, giving testimony to their progress against the rubric. Together, they had begun to fashion a strategy for shaping, capturing, and measuring what is distinctive and important about the community-based learning at the heart of the Rural Trust.

### Creating a System

With these preliminary experiences under our belt, the Rural Trust national staff and the Harvard assessment team launched a partnership with Educational Testing Services (ETS) to create a full-fledged, portfolio-based documentation and evaluation system for the Rural Trust. With the Rural Trust's field staff (stewards), we have recruited a design team that includes three representatives (closest to the work) from eight projects, joined by stewards and the Harvard team, and led by ETS. The team will meet three to four times over the coming year, with the goals of:

1. Developing a portfolio structuring process that includes protocols, support materials, rubrics, etc.
2. Sharpening the existing statement of Rural Trust principles.
3. Developing a common understanding of principles, rubrics, and quality through the design process, and developing materials that will support this common understanding.
4. Developing materials that help projects move from descriptions of activities to analysis of evidence—toward portfolios that "make the case."
5. Developing a library of exemplars that demonstrate principles, evidence, and different levels of quality and growth.
6. Developing mechanisms or protocols for the presentation of portfolios.
7. Developing protocols for the evaluation of portfolios.
8. Developing a plan for sharing with all Rural Trust sites.

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## ***Making the Best Better*** from page 6

### **Promoting Analysis and Reflection**

As those who prepared and presented portfolios at this July's pilot meeting know firsthand, this is hard work—and an enterprise for which few teachers, students, or community members have experience or time. It is, nonetheless, rewarding work. Participants at the July meeting commented that assembling a portfolio of their work and then standing back from it had been extraordinary: "We really had no idea how much we'd done and how far we'd come," said one. "We also learned how much further we need to travel."

The process of constructing a portfolio is in itself a powerful self-learning tool. A strong portfolio "builds a case" by presenting evidence that addresses critical questions about the purposes, methods, and results of a student's, teacher's, or school's work. The business of collecting, selecting, then analyzing the evidence helps participants learn more about their own efforts; the ability to distinguish between "better" and "worse" is a critical aspect of improvement. Presenting one's case to those several steps removed—what some call "critical friends"—further this analysis and reflection.

Without such a process, it can be hard to see clearly all the strengths and weaknesses of a project when you live and breathe it daily. And whether school-community teams are engaged in self-evaluation or reviewing the work of their peers, Rural Trust project participants need to be able to peg just where they and others are along a continuum that measures quality.

### **Learning Together**

What has our own analysis and reflection about our early experiences with portfolios taught us so far?

From the perspective of the national staff and Harvard team, we realize that we did not give project teams participating in this spring's pilot phase enough direction before they began assembling their portfolios. Our initial instructions, for example, failed to stress the impor-

tance of context—of supplying stage-setting narrative and background information about the evidence to follow. In hindsight, we should have urged portfolio makers to begin with an introduction that summarized what would be featured, how the portfolio was compiled, who compiled it, why a particular project was selected for inclusion, and who participated in the scoring.

We also failed to ask for specific details about particular projects. How did this project come about, for example? What time and resources has it required? How many students have been involved?

The links between work in the community and the classroom called for more explanation. The importance of a particular piece of evidence was not always clear. The project's relation to—and impact on—the larger school curriculum needed clarifying. If "location, location, location" is a motto for real estate, "context, context, context" (we've learned) is a good motto for portfolios.

With regard to the evidence presented, the portfolios contained a rich array of newspaper clippings, student journal entries and essays, informational material about the projects, photographs, videos, CDs, and print publications. If we were to single out the one thing that would have strengthened the evidence presented, though, it would be *more examples of student work*.

Instead of a newspaper article about students making a presentation to the community about a particular issue, include the students' presentation itself. If a poetry class on nature writing was part of a project, include some of the students' poems (maybe show a first and final draft of a poem to illustrate a student's increasing mastery). Rather than show photos of the backboards students made for a science project (photos in which, typically, it's impossible to read or decipher much), pick one or two student efforts and present them in detail.

With experience as the best teacher, these early lessons show us what we need to work on in the months ahead.

### **Looking Ahead**

How will we know if the Rural Trust's investment in portfolio documentation and assessment is paying off? It will pay off if, together, we create effective tools

for measuring progress against a set of broadly shared expectations. It will pay off if we create a constituency: teachers, students, parents, and community members who feel they're learning valuable lessons from this approach to assessment. It will pay off if the evidence we collect is compelling in the eyes of appointed and elected officials, funders, and others whose support we need. Finally, it will pay off if, like the tide, it lifts the quality of the work for all who have dropped anchor with the Rural Trust.

## ***Four New Trustees Elected to Rural Trust Board***

from page 8

and Vice President of Radcliffe College. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter appointed her as Director of the National Institute of Education, where she served until 1979. From 1991 to 2000, she served as President of the Spencer Foundation in Chicago. Dr. Graham also serves on the boards of the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, the Josiah Macy, Jr., Foundation, the Johnson Foundation, the Hitachi Foundation, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and the Chicago Annenberg Challenge.

Paul Martinez is the Director of the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (CESDP) at New Mexico Highlands University at Las Vegas. The CESDP was created by the New Mexico State Legislature in 1993 to assist rural communities in improving the quality of education for citizens statewide. Having worked in the states of Colorado, Illinois, and New Mexico, Dr. Martinez has been a classroom teacher, district administrator, tenured faculty member, department chairperson, and technical assistance center director. He also has served as a consultant to state departments of education, the U.S. Department of Education, and private industry. Dr. Martinez serves on the Board of Directors of the National Association for Bilingual Education, and until recently, was on the board of the National Education Knowledge Industry Association. He is nationally recognized as an expert in the area of bilingual and multicultural education.





## Rural Roots

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### *Hot Topic: Rendezvous 2000 Roundup—See Pages 4 & 5*

## Four New Trustees Elected to Rural Trust Board

Leanna Landsmann, Mollie Hale Carter, Patricia Graham, and Paul Martinez have joined the Board of Trustees of the Rural School and Community Trust, greatly expanding the reach and diversity of the volunteer body that governs the organization. A Board nominating committee headed by Art Campbell, Assistant Secretary for Economic Development at the U.S. Department of Commerce, proposed the new members for election and the Board approved the nominations at its June and November meetings. "These four new Board members not only bring incredible professional experience to the Board, but also a real passion for our work with rural schools and communities," said Rachel Tompkins, President of the Rural Trust. "We are delighted that they have agreed to join our efforts."

Leanna Landsmann is President of TIME For Kids, a publication reaching more than 2.6 million student readers nationwide. Prior to joining TIME For Kids, Landsmann owned and ran her own company, Leanna Landsmann, Inc, where she worked with major corporations and associations that publish instructional materials for schools to market their outreach efforts. In 1994, Landsmann launched New York City's Principal for a Day initiative and directed the program as a volunteer for two years. She also serves on the boards of the Getty Institute for Education in the Arts and PENCIL (Public Education Needs Civic Involvement in Learning.)

Mollie Hale Carter is a Vice President for Star A, Inc., a family-owned farming operation and investment business, with offices in Shawnee Mission,

Kansas. She is also Chairman of the Board of Sunflower Banks, Inc., which has branches located throughout central and western Kansas. From 1987 to 1997, Carter worked for the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company, serving as the Senior Investment Officer of the Bond and Corporate Finance Department managing investments in the food and beverage industry. She was an Assistant to the President and an Assistant Consultant for Agribusiness Associates, Inc. from 1984 to 1986. She is a director of the Archer Daniels Midland Company.

Patricia Graham is the Charles Warren Professor of the History of American Education at Harvard University. She has written four books and numerous articles on education issues. Dr. Graham began her career as a teacher and high school counselor and later moved into higher education, where she lectured at Northern Michigan University and Columbia University. She also served as Dean of the Radcliffe Institute

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Volume 2, No. 1  
February 2001



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# Rural Roots

*News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust*

## Student Recording Projects Capture Rural Culture, History

**T**he recorded voice serves as a means of preserving our place and time, a type of history that can convey something words on paper cannot. Two rural school projects are using different media to record their voices and others for posterity, creating final products that demonstrate both the breadth of their studies and the importance of the spoken word.



*Students interview horse-whisperer and songwriter Bud Johnson. During the session, he demonstrated his songwriting skills by creating one for Sarah Sorice on the spot. Students are, from left to right: Morgan Brundahl-Smith, Danielle Maruna, Daniel Gowan, Dominic Schwenter, Sarah Sorice and Marci Pronsolino*

From the sharing of ideas and information among teachers involved in the National Writing Project's *Rural Voices Country Schools* program emerged a six-part radio series on compact disk entitled, *Rural Voices Radio: Writing About the Places We Call Home*. The CD set has been distributed to radio stations and National Writing Project sites across the country.

Instead of studying local history in textbooks, students in Anderson Valley, California are learning from Anderson Valley elders through interviews that are digitally recorded, transcribed, and then

published as a compact disc with an accompanying book, both titled *Voices of the Valley*.

### "Rural Voices Radio"

A sense of place has long been a focus for writing projects in rural areas of the country. What better way to evoke a sense of community spirit or a sense of self than by learning to express that connection through writing? Reading what students write when given the prompt, "I am from . . ." is a fulfilling and welcoming activity for many of those involved with rural schools.

Imagine reading these opening lines of a poem by a student in Nebraska: "I am from spotted Holstein milk cows, long-legged bawling calves, and lazy tom cats lying in the barn." Now, imagine hearing the voice of that student, with all of his emotive quality, accompanying remarks and regional accent, as he reads the lines of his poem. Now THAT will give you a sense of place.

The National Writing Project (NWP) released its first spoken-word production, *Rural Voices Radio: Writing About*

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## Mark Your Calendar!

**March 19–20, 2001**

### Fourth Annual Student Extravaganza

#### Holiday Inn Convention Center; Kearney, NE

More than 500 students, educators, business people, and community leaders are expected at the Student Extravaganza 2001. The conference will explore how youth can contribute to rural America's well being.

Students present all sessions, addressing business start-ups by youth, community planning, technology applications, community service and leadership, the value of understanding rural heritage, environmental advocacy and much more. Student Extravaganza 2001 is currently seeking students to present at this year's conference. Interested presenters can submit a request online (web address below).

To learn more about the conference, to register or submit a proposal for a presentation at the conference, go to [www.geocities.com/studentextravaganza](http://www.geocities.com/studentextravaganza) or contact Robi Kroger; (308) 728-7882; [robi@cornhusker.net](mailto:robi@cornhusker.net)

**March 29–31, 2001**

### Kids Who Know and Do: Co-Nect Conference

#### San Francisco, CA

The Kids Who Know and Do conference, previously organized by the Autodesk Foundation, will bring together students and educators to share and learn from others about their place-based learning experiences. Both students and educators have been asked to be presenters and exhibitors.

To learn more about the conference, go to [www.co-nect.net/Co-nect/html/](http://www.co-nect.net/Co-nect/html/)

[kwkd/index.html](http://kwkd/index.html). The registration fee is \$275 if you register before February 15; it will be \$335 after that date. Students are \$25. To register, go to: <http://www.eventregistration.com/events/co-nect>

**April 3–5, 2001**

### Stewardship Institute 2001: Documenting, Sharing and Strengthening Our Work Through Project Portfolios

#### Simpsonwood Conference and Retreat Center; Norcross, GA

This year's Stewardship Institute grows directly out of several Rural Trust projects that have been engaged in developing a portfolio-based assessment tool that will help them document, analyze, and reflect on their experiences with implementing place-based learning.

Stewardship Institute participants will have an opportunity to learn more about the portfolio design process, and share ideas with those that have participated in the design process.

To register, contact Linda Martin *no later than March 5, 2001*: PO Box 1569, Granby, CO 80446. Fax: (970) 887-1065; E-mail: [linda.martin@ruraledu.org](mailto:linda.martin@ruraledu.org)

**October 24–27, 2001**

### The 93rd Annual National Rural Education Association (NREA) Convention, Rural Education—Celebrating Diversity

#### Albuquerque, New Mexico (Albuquerque Marriott Hotel)

The theme of the NREA meeting is diversity and one strand of workshops



## Rural Roots

Vol. 2, No. 1

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Rural Roots is published six times a year by the Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling.

Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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Design: Editype, Harrisonburg, Va.

will be around place-based learning. This will be a great opportunity to present ongoing work and share with others. The Rural Trust is also sponsoring one of the main speakers.

Make room reservations at 1-800-228-9290. For more information, contact NREA headquarters in Colorado at (970) 491-7022 or go to their website at [www.colostate.edu/orgs/NREA/](http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/NREA/).



## New Partnership in Mississippi Will Improve Student Writing

Two Rural Trust projects in the Mississippi Delta have joined forces to improve student writing in five school districts by providing an intensive teacher development program that integrates writing with place-based curriculum.

The Mississippi Delta Five Cluster is partnering with the Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute (the Institute), a site for the National Writing Project. The area of the Delta Five spans the counties of Bolivar, Washington, Issaquena and Sharkey, serves over 7,000 students and covers 2,441 square miles in the Mississippi Delta. Groups from one high school or middle school from each of the five districts will be central to the initial implementation of the programs—programs that will provide teacher development in order to improve student work and learning.

In 1998, similar Institute programs in two rural Mississippi school districts (West Point and Kemper County) produced significant improvement in state-wide student assessment scores. Scores in Kemper County School District rose district-wide, with the most progression in the fourth grade—where every teacher participated in ongoing writing project professional development during the fall of that year.

The Institute is working with teacher teams from each school district to produce similar results for the Delta Five. Most recently, the two groups met to discuss their partnership, determine individual district needs and mutually define the methodology of their plans.

The staff of the institute wrote a mission statement, "We will provide staff development that will assist teachers in integrating curriculum, research and communities of the Delta into a rich and long-lasting cultural experience for students." From that idea, the groups defined a list of requirements for the projects. These conditions dictated that the projects must be place-based, have writing at the heart, be authentic, involve ongoing work that creates new relationships within the community, involve

individual and collaborative work for students, and have a clearly defined "big idea."

"This is one of the most extensive writing project sites both in the size of the area and scope of work," one of the Institute's Teacher-in-Residence Suzanne Thompson said. "The programs we will create together will be place-based pro-

grams that will truly get to the heart of Mississippi's at-risk students."

The teacher groups and Institute staff have a long and complex road ahead of them as they meet in the future to set site-specific goals and create projects unique to the schools. Believing in the National Writing Project's basic assumption that, "working as partners, universities and schools can articulate and promote effective school reform," the Institute and the school leaders from the Delta Five plan on meeting the challenges of rural schooling head-on.

## Williams Joins Rural Trust

Doris Terry Williams joined the Rural Trust as Director of Capacity Building on February 1. Currently Assistant Dean and Associate Professor at the North Carolina Central University School of Education and Director of University-School Partnerships, Dr. Williams has worked with the NCCU School of Education since 1992, leading teacher education program reform, establishing pre-service professional development schools, and directing university/public school partnerships.

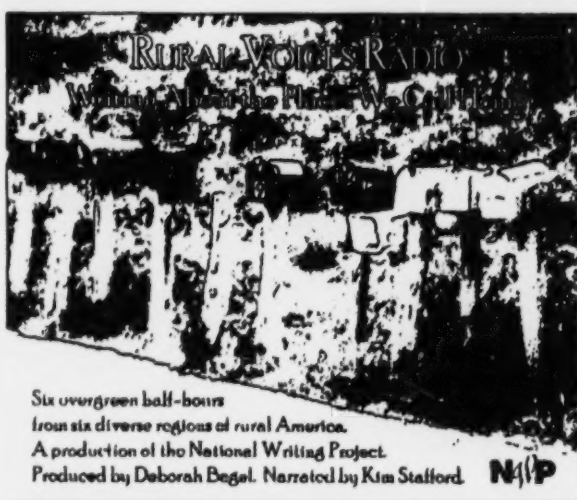
Filling a newly created position at the Rural Trust, Williams will supervise the Trust's Stewards program and oversee the documentation and assessment team at Harvard. She will also focus on the organization's emerging work in rural arts education and teacher preparation.

Williams helped to found, and subsequently directed, the North Carolina Center for the Study of Black History, and was a founder of the public service radio station WVSP. She also founded and ran Pen and Press United, an advertising and publishing firm, and produced and hosted a radio series on minority economic development.



Williams has lived her entire adult life in rural North Carolina where she recently completed 12 years of service on the Warren County Board of Education, serving for five of those years as its chair. Williams holds Ed.D. and M.Ed. degrees from North Carolina State University, and an A.B. from Duke University.

Williams is looking forward to weaving together the many threads of her past experience together as she takes on this new role.



Rural Voices Radio is a spoken anthology about home and community with original writing by students and their teachers. An initiative of the National Writing Project, this timorous collection vividly portrays the unique and diverse landscapes of rural America. Listen, as new voices take us to places we call home.



"Not only are Rural Voices eloquent and deeply moving, they reveal the genius of 'simple' American people. Over and above all else, they offer hope."

—Studs Terkel



Established in 1974, the National Writing Project spans 40 states and encompasses teachers at every grade level. The NWP is recognized for pioneering exemplary models of teaching and learning in America's schools. Funding for Rural Voices Radio was provided by the NWP, Anderson Rural School & Community Trust and U.S. Department of Education. © 1999 National Writing Project. All rights reserved. Duplication by any means is prohibited without express written permission from NWP. <http://www.nwproject.org> email: [enrich@nwproject.org](mailto:enrich@nwproject.org)

## Student Recording Projects Capture Rural Culture, History

from page 1

the *Places We Call Home* last May, a six-part CD set featuring the voices of students and teachers at rural writing project sites across the country. Writing project teachers from Arizona, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Washington studied the needs of their areas and worked with local institutions and organizations to strengthen community involvement in the classroom. The teacher groups met often to share ideas, information and questions with each other.

The radio program CDs that resulted from the collaboration were an unexpected outcome of the discussions, according to Laura Paradise, Program Associate at NWP. "It was thought of as a different way to create an audience for the students' work," she said. Radio was viewed by the teachers as a means of spreading the word and work of the rural schools, and reminding the public of the importance of place and community.

The students and teachers wrote about their sense of belonging and place, inspired by family, heritage, landscape and culture. The voices of the children and teachers, as well as local sounds, were recorded by Deborah Begel, an award-winning radio producer. Kim Stafford narrated the programs. The end product is a gift, and a guide to understanding

the places we all call home to listeners around the country.

The CDs have been played on stations across the country, and not just in rural areas. "[The CDs] have been more successful than we expected ... listeners are excited just to hear children's voices on the radio," Paradise noted.

The project has been so successful, in fact, that NWP is planning another set of CDs featuring the same theme of place. "We want to keep building upon and using the excitement generated from the CDs," says Paradise.

The use of technology to enhance classroom learning and share rural students' work with a wider audience is just the beginning. As narrator Kim Stafford noted in NWP's bimonthly newsletter: "The FCC is working to license a host of new local stations, and there may be a place for web-based audio, for student audio anthologies from individual schools, for subject-oriented audio programs, student audio portfolios, [and] oral history programs."

After listening to the CDs, there is no doubt that Emily Dickinson was correct when she wrote: "A word is dead when it is said, some say. I say, it just begins to live that day." More recently, another, younger, poet wrote,

"I am a poet using words to SEE the

cheetah run in the field, HEAR the water flowing down the river, FEEL the sun heating the earth, smell the SWEET flowers in the meadow, taste the delicious APPLES in the orchard. See, hear, feel, smell, taste nature itself."

(emphasis added)

Hear for yourself why Timothy Goya's reading of his poem (above) is so extremely endearing. At NWP's website, [www.writingproject.org](http://www.writingproject.org), you can download the series or order your own set. You can also locate the station nearest you that has received a copy of the set and call them with a request to hear it on the air.

### "Voices of the Valley"

As your local landscape changes and people move or pass away, will the story of your town be lost forever?

Students at Anderson Valley High School in rural Mendocino County, California, advised by North Coast Rural Challenge Network coordinator Mitch Mendosa, are making sure that the voices of their town will be more than just echoes, as they record the stories of Anderson Valley through a series of interviews and conversations with local residents.

"We're preserving people's stories so that 100 years from now, people will be able to pick up our book and read all about the valley. Things around here will change, but the stories will always be there," said Leah Collins, a student historian working with the project.

Having completed two volumes of *Voices of the Valley*—a book and audio CD set—a new group of students is currently at work on Volume III, interviewing the people of Anderson Valley, transcribing the conversations and creating a final product complete with digitally enhanced black and white photos.

The project takes students out of the classroom and into the homes of Anderson Valley residents. Teams of students interview, digitally record, transcribe, collect and take photos, edit the text, lay out the book and mass produce compact discs. The whole process usually takes 18 months to complete, but this time the students are aiming to complete the entire project by May.

"We're attempting to do it in one year ... but only if the students continue to type quickly," says Mendosa, with a laugh. "At this point it seems to them like they've been typing forever ... they're inundated with the transcription process."

The books are a word-for-word transcription of the conversations between the elders and students. It was important to the students to preserve exactly how people spoke and not retell the elders' stories through the use of a narrative, so that readers could come to their own conclusions. Says Mendosa: "[The narrative approach] is not quite as interesting, because then you're looking at the story through the lens of one student."

For Volume III, the students are focusing on a broad cross-section of individuals with many different experiences—a break from their earlier focus on people who had grown up or were born in the valley. Two of the interviews are completely in Spanish, and have been translated by students for the book. The students introduced broad conversation topics for the elders to comment on, instead of using a standard set of questions for each interview as they had done previously. They even pre-interviewed the participants so that the students, and interviewees, were prepared and the actual recording sessions would be smoother.

The skills that the students are gathering go beyond typing proficiency. "I learned communication skills, like how to speak and deal with older people ...

you have to talk loud and slowly," said Gabe Shapiro, another student historian. He also learned how to improvise conversation topics when the conversation lagged, an imperative skill in today's fast-paced world.

The students' technical aptitude has increased as well. Daniel Gowan gained experience in editing sound using digital audio technology and mixer boards. Danielle Maruna learned how to shoot and enhance digital photos.

Real-world skills go a long way; real-world understanding goes even further. "... [W]hen students and elders work together on common goals that benefit the community, magic happens," said Mendosa in his introduction to Volume II. "When students hear about the days when our elders were young, barriers vanish and communication flourishes."

The stories of the Anderson Valley community are bountiful. Like the countless tales the students have heard about "Boontling," the local dialect that was created long ago to baffle outsiders. A few valley elders still speak Boontling and have shared it with the students. Or the local "Hatfield and McCoy" feud between the Hanes and Crispin families: student Morgan Brudahl-Smith, a Hanes descendant, learned a slightly different side of the story during one interview with a valley elder, who happened to be a Crispin heir.

Another tale of interest is the prisoner-of-war story told by Carroll Pratt, a retiree from Hollywood credited with updating the laugh track in the '70s—a local celebrity by valley standards and a subject of curiosity to natives for many years. Dominic Schwenter was among the students interviewing the World War II veteran. "I was lucky enough to be sitting in on [the interview] ... we weren't sure if he would want to talk about it, but he was able to," said Schwenter. Pratt told of being a fighter pilot in Africa, what he went through after his plane was

shot down and how he traded in his bomber jacket to secure food for himself and other POWs. The students were moved by his story and paused the interview to discuss the relationship between Pratt and the two interviewers (Schwenter, along with Stefan Sorice), who were both of German heritage.

These and other tales are the amazing stories of Anderson Valley that would have been lost if not for the students and the *Voices of the Valley* project. According to Mendosa and his students, there are many more stories to tell. Since the publications of Volumes I and II, four of the elders interviewed have passed away, making the group "keenly aware of the importance of their work," said Mendosa in Volume II's introduction.



A newspaper clipping about Carroll Pratt's POW experience

#### PRATT IS NOW PRISONER

Somewhere in a German Prison Camp, Oct. 12, 1943.

Dear Dad: (Ed. Note, Skipper Pratt to the Studio):

"I really meant it when I said that things were much better than could be expected. I've met many fellows that I knew. We have our own organization and little intervention from our captors. We form combines of six or seven and cook our own meals. (Food from the Red Cross and the German government). Please donate to the Red Cross and the Prisoner of War Funds!

"We are allowed to receive all the mail we want, and one ten pound package a month ... specifically need handkerchiefs, socks, underwear, small knife, candy, gum.

Number Come and Went

"One thing I felt sure when the chute opened was that now I was sure I'd see you again ... my number came and went.

"Carroll (Lt. Carroll Pratt)."

The students of Anderson Valley, California have their own story to tell: by creating a connection to their community and bridging the generation gap between young and old, the history of their town will not be lost.

The books are sold in local stores, as well as businesses frequented by tourists. Volume I sold over 700 copies; Volume II has already sold 300.

To get a copy of the two volumes published and to request a copy of Volume III upon publication in May, contact Mitch Mendosa at (707) 895-2199 or e-mail him at mmendosa@avusd.k12.ca.us. You can also send a request in writing with a check (made out to AVUSD) for \$24 to P.O. Box 830; Boonville, CA 95415.



# Student-Run Grocery Store Up and Running

*Wolf Den Market a "Huge Hope for a Dying Community"*

**A**fter a three-year effort, the 123 citizens of Arthur, Nebraska finally have a grocery store in their town again, and the students of the Arthur County High School believe they have made the first step in the struggle to save their town.

With the population shrinking since the early 1900s and businesses shutting down, the closing of the grocery store three years ago made difficult matters worse for the few people left in the town. The closest outlet for food became an inconvenient 30-40 minutes away. The citizens thought that without a grocery store, more people than ever would leave. Population shrinkage could lead to the closing of the high school and two elementary schools in the county, or worse, a buy-out of the remaining citizens to turn the land into buffalo habitat.

A group of students stepped forward and said they were not going to let that happen. Thanks to the ingenuity and ambition of those students and their adult advisors, what seemed like an incredible pipe dream became reality on November 15, 2000 when a student-run grocery store, the Wolf Den Market, opened for its first day of business.

The store opened, but not before a considerable amount of time was spent planning—with some setbacks. "It is just amazing to me how hard the kids worked on this project. They really took hold of it and didn't give up," said Chuck Karpf, a community organizer with Nebraska's School at the Center

and advisor to the grocery store project.

"At times I know that part of my job is to be a cheerleader to those involved in the project. In Arthur, there are kids and community members that are putting so much time and effort into the project, and sometimes they get frustrated," he said. It takes cooperation and a strong community to make such a project successful, and Karpf believes that projects such as this one set the example for other communities attempting to rebuild.

**"It is just amazing to me how hard the kids worked on this project. They really took hold of it and didn't give up."**

*—Chuck Karpf, a community organizer with Nebraska's School at the Center and advisor to the grocery store project.*

"Without the community's support, we never could have done this!" said Wolf Den public relations officer and Board member, tenth-grader Patricia Steel. She also said that the time she has spent on the project has translated

into a lack of sleep, but an increase in skills. "I've learned so much, I can't really pinpoint just one thing."

The students started by conducting a market survey to understand the community's shopping habits, preferences and willingness to support the venture. They then held a community meeting in November 1999 to generate local confidence and interest. Over 100 people attended. At last year's Student Extravaganza, the group made a presentation to their peers based on their experience, titled "Huge Hopes for a Dying Community."



*Patricia Steel stocks shelves at the Wolf Den Market.*

Once the group had ensured community support, they had to start making tangible strides such as securing a building, creating a business plan and determining financial considerations. Selecting a suitable building was a significant hurdle. They wanted to open a place on the main street, but the cost to buy a store, or even rent one, was above their budget. They finally settled on an old house made of railroad ties, that sits several hundred feet from the central shopping area. The students and community members cleaned and painted the building and solicited in-kind donations for services and products from area businesses. The store's phone lines were installed for free and the power company is providing 1,000 free kilowatt hours a month for six months.

The group then asked Dredla's

Grocery in Hyannis to supply groceries, at three percent above cost, to be transported to Arthur by Wolf Den volunteers twice a week. That way the store can avoid ordering more than they need and avoid shipping costs. If someone needs an item, they can put in a request and the store will add it to their order for the week. In a *Wall Street Journal* feature story on the Wolf Den Market on January 3, 2001, the owners of Dredla's grocery said they are helping the competition just, "being a good neighbor."

The Wolf Den will be owned by the community as a co-op, and managed by its first and only employee, Rita Bowland. The shares have not yet been priced, but they are estimated to cost between \$25-50 a year. Only a small

percentage of all sales can be to non-co-op members.

Laura Cooney, a member of the Wolf Den's Board of Directors, a school board member and elementary school teacher, says that there will be relatively few non-members. "Some community members were a little skeptical at first, but now I think they're really supportive because the kids are involved. If that isn't reason enough, the store has made it so they no longer have to drive for groceries."

The Wolf Den offers many perks that other stores cannot. Says Cooney: "Rita always has the coffee pot going with all sorts of flavors. A lot of people go to buy a loaf of bread and they'll spend an hour there, just drinking coffee and visiting with people." Another

advantage of the small market is the credit service. Bowland keeps money envelopes behind the counter for families to draw from when they shop, instead of having to worry about bringing the correct amount with them.

Cooney said that the store takes in about \$300 a day. Although they have enough money and support to keep the store going, Karpf says that figure will have to increase to \$500 and the group will have to start bringing in co-op funds in order for the store to break even.

To many involved in the project, it's not about breaking even. It's about sustaining a community, learning from real-life experience and proving that students can maintain the respect—and the grocery list—of a community.

## First Person

### *Turning an Idea Into Reality:*

# A First Person Account of the Wolf Den Market

by Sabrina Sample

I'm Sabrina Sample from Arthur, Nebraska. I'm 15 years old and in 9th grade at Arthur County High School. The population in Arthur is only 123. We just got a new grocery store. That's where I come in. I helped get the store going, along with Spencer Larsen, Robbie Wilson, Travis and Amy Marshall, Charlie and Patricia Steel, Alison Cullinan, Jessie White, and Amanda Penner. We are all high school kids from ACHS.

I was only 13 when we SIA (Students in Action) thought of the project. But before us, Scott Trimble, the business teacher, and his business math class thought of it. They had gotten a business plan started and did a lot of research. That's when we started to get into the project. Scott Trimble, and community members, Laura Cooney, Joy Marshall and Virginia Sizer got a grant to do the project. The grant was for \$22,500. Without this grant we couldn't have

made it. The grant was called LB144. The grant money was used to fund such things as Seeds Day, a trip to Minnesota to visit a student-run store, and a video library.

When I was 14, we really got into doing the project. We held a phone survey to find out what the community thought of a student-run grocery store and what they thought of having a grocery store back in Arthur, because we hadn't [had] a grocery store for three years. Before we got the new store, people had to go 40 miles just to get groceries.

Then we had to find a building to use for the store. We had a hard time trying to find a building to use. We finally decided to use my Aunt ReNee Peterson's house. The unique thing about the house is that it's made out of railroad ties. We made a deal with her about the rent. Before we did find a building, we got many free items, such as shelves, from Wal-Mart because they were moving into a new building.

On Saturdays the Board of Directors, Jackie McConkey, Virginia Sizer, Travis, Amy, and Joy Marshall, Jessie White, Charlie and Patricia Steel, Scott Trimble, Laura Cooney, Vickie Morrell, and I as secretary, and volunteers, went up to the house and cleaned and painted the rooms. While we were doing that, we had to find a manager. After some interviewing, we decided to have Rita Bowland, a local community member, be the manager. A few weeks before the store opened, the entire school helped clean, paint and put up shelves. I had a lot of fun doing that.

On November 15th, 2000 the Wolf Den Market opened. It was a really great success and a lot of people showed up. I think the grocery store will continue to be successful.

All my experience with this is positive. I've learned what it takes to be a leader, how to get people interested in projects and, most importantly, how to get a business up and going.

The store is now making about \$1000 a week. The most important thing, I think, is that the community is a lot happier because we have another reason for living in a very small town and a reason to bring more people to the town of Arthur.



## Rural Roots

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### *Hot Topic: Rural Trust Receives Getty Grant for Rural Arts Education —See Below*

## Rural Trust Receives Getty Grant for Rural Arts Education

The J. Paul Getty Trust has awarded a planning grant of \$125,000 for the Rural Trust's rural arts education program, *Renewing the Color of Rural America*. Based on the Getty belief that cultural enlightenment and community involvement in the arts can help lead to a more civil society, the grant will fund the Rural Trust's program to foster the appreciation and experience of the arts in rural communities.

In announcing the grant at the Rural Trust's February board meeting, Board Chairman Jack Murrah said: "This partnership and endorsement from Getty helps lay the groundwork for rural public schools across America to become the arts centers of their communities. It is a great learning opportunity for kids, a great cultural opportunity for rural communities."

With this grant, the Rural Trust is organizing a series of meetings with schools and communities across the country. Community leaders, teachers and students will be asked to participate and give their ideas on arts education, based on initiatives that: support collaborative community/school arts education programs; address the lack of arts education opportunities in rural schools and communities; prepare teachers to integrate the arts throughout the curriculum; integrate local arts and artists into the arts education experience of all; introduce rural students and community members to the rich resources of regional, national and international museums through technology; and assist rural residents in discovering the connections between local art and the art of the world.

The Trust will then meet with leaders from each region to merge their ideas into a coherent and coordinated national arts education effort that will culminate in a proposal for a national program. The national program will build a network of rural schools and communities working together to make the arts an integral part of the life of rural communities and the learning experience of rural students.

Ultimately, the Trust hopes to create an infrastructure that will enable rural areas to use the arts to enrich the student and community learning experience by providing teacher training, promoting student involvement, encouraging community action and increasing technological innovations.



Volume 2, No. 2  
April 2001



ISSN 1532-642X

# Rural Roots

*News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust*

## Students Map Resources of Robeson County, NC

**T**he high school students of Robeson County, North Carolina know that their county is the state's largest—and that it is only about ten percent smaller than the state of Rhode Island.

That tremendous size hasn't stopped them from setting out to create a series of special maps that document the ecological, cultural, historical, civic and recreational resources of the area.

They are doing so with the help of the Rural Education Advancement Program (REAP) and the Center for Community Action (CCA), led by Mac Legerton, and the Green Map System. Two maps have already been completed: Red Springs and Prospect. Within the next couple of years, the students hope to complete the more than 40 separate community maps it will take to chart the historical, cultural and biological diversity of their entire county. Those individual maps—some of areas that have never been mapped before—will then be combined into one large, county-wide map, for use by citizens, teachers and visitors.

The Green Map Systems (GMS) was founded by Modern World Design in 1995, sparked by positive public response to the *Green Apple Map of NYC*, the first Green Map that charted the

"green" hot spots of New York City. The basis of the GMS system involves the use of icons, or symbols, that identify and promote environmental resources—both natural and cultural—on locally-produced maps. Most of the maps have been designed for cities, and plot such things as farmers markets, star-gazing sites, air pollution sources and museums (see left). Any group can create a map of any area, as long as no one else has already printed or planned a map of that area.

The Green Map of Robeson County is unique for many reasons—even by Green Map standards. It is one of the first Green Maps of a rural area, the first Green Map of North Carolina, and one of the few Green Maps in the world to include local historical and cultural sites along with environmental resources. Adding in historical and cultural sites was the idea of Mac Legerton, Program

Director at CCA. He felt that using the Green Map project in local schools would help to promote community, cultural and self-identity in Robeson County, a county where curriculum materials focusing on local history and culture were scarce and ethnic diversity and tension high.

The Green Map project became a "crusade" for CCA, rooted in one simple assertion: convince citizens to know why and how their community is unique, and they will take pride in their surroundings.

High school senior Caroline Sumtter put it best: "The project is about letting people know that we're [a community] rich in culture, and there's a lot to offer here ... it's just a matter of going out there and looking for it."

### The Process of Making a Green Map

Making the maps is a multi-step process, starting with choosing a geographic region, then dividing that region into separate neighborhoods. Next, a sample walk around the area helps to decide which resources should be the focus of investigations. For the students in Prospect and Red Springs, their lists of things to mark, such as "oldest tree," "churches," "swamps," "historical sites," "voting locations" and "native plants," gave them a chance to ask elders in the community

continued on page 7



KC 023 273

**RuralDatebook****Mark Your Calendar!****April 26-28, 2001**

**Rural Trust Southwest**  
(Arizona, California,  
New Mexico, Texas)  
**Regional Meeting**  
Glorieta, Santa Fe, NM

Contact Jose Colchado at (520) 908-0262, or by e-mail at jose.colchado@ruraledu.org.

**May 10-11, 2001**

**Rural Trust Appalachian**  
(Georgia, Kentucky,  
Tennessee) **Regional Meeting**  
**Meadowview Conference**  
**Center, Kingsport, TN**

Contact Marty Newell at (859) 323-9925, or by e-mail at marty.newell@ruraledu.org.

**May 16-19, 2001**

**Skill Building for Stronger**  
**Communities**

**Sponsored by the Heartland**  
**Center for Leadership**  
**Development**

**Snow King Resort,**  
**Jackson Hole, WY**

This annual seminar is designed for people who wish to improve their community development skills.

For registration information, contact the Heartland Center for Leadership Development at (402) 474-7667 or 1-800-927-1115, or e-mail at heartcld@aol.com. More information is also available on the web at [www.4w/heartland](http://www.4w/heartland). Preregistration is \$550, before April 16.

**June 18-20, 2001**

**Rural Trust Upper Midwest**  
(Michigan, Minnesota,  
Wisconsin) **Regional Meeting**  
**Wolf Ridge Environmental**  
**Center in Finland, MN**

Contact Elaine Salinas at (920) 497-3602, or by e-mail at elaine.salinas@ruraledu.org.

**June 25-27, 2001**

**Rural Trust Northwest (Alaska,**  
**California, Idaho, Oregon,**  
**Washington) Regional Meeting**  
**near Yosemite National Park**  
**and Mariposa, CA**

Contact Sylvia Parker at (970) 482-9572, or by e-mail at sylvia.parker@ruraledu.org.

**June 25-27, 2001**

**Community Celebration**  
**Institute**

**Sponsored by PACERS,**  
**Program for Rural Services**  
**and Research and Community**  
**Celebration of Place**

**University of Alabama,**  
**Tuscaloosa**

Community Celebration is founded on the work of *Elders' Wisdom, Children's Song*, a program that incorporates the tools of community organizing, education and celebration through storytelling in song and spoken word.

This training is for experienced and new leaders of *Elders' Wisdom, Children's Song*. Sessions are designed to enable those with experience to reflect on the

**Rural Roots**

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Rural Roots is published six times a year by the Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling.

Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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Director of Communications:

Kathryn E. Westra

Editor: H. Alison Yaunches

Design: Editype, Harrisonburg, Va.

program and discuss ways to incorporate it into year-round curriculum. For those who are new to the program and want to become leaders in their own communities, there will be sessions about the particulars of carrying it out. SPACE IS LIMITED and registration closes soon. Please let PACERS know as soon as possible if you plan to attend. The registration fee is \$295, and there are partial as well as full scholarships available. For more information, call (205) 348-6432

# Rural Trust to Establish Finance Center

It's happening all around the country. Inequities in education finance are increasingly being scrutinized by lawmakers and citizens, and the Rural School and Community Trust is taking measures to ensure that rural schools will not be overlooked amid all of the litigation and legislation. Specifically, the Rural Trust is set to unveil its Rural Education Finance Center (REFC) within the next year. The REFC will be an information clearinghouse designed to counteract the confusion that surrounds education finance in rural communities.

## Examining Equity

In January, Justice LeLand DeGrasse found the New York State education aid system illegal, citing the state's inability to give each student "a sound basic education" as guaranteed by the state constitution. He found the system in violation of federal civil rights law, stating that it disproportionately harms minority students. DeGrasse gave the state's legislature until September 15 to get things right, and Governor George Pataki has since vowed that he will appeal the ruling. Of note is the fact that, with few exceptions, coverage of this event focused on New York City's 1.1 million students, even though the judge's decision identified 205 disadvantaged districts in the state, 200 of which are rural.

In Ohio, a similar deadline is drawing near. The state supreme court found in May 1999 that Ohio was not providing the "thorough and efficient" system of education promised in the state constitution. The legislature has until this June to provide an adequate resolution to its finance methods.

Taking a different approach, Kansas Governor Bill Graves appointed a special task force last year to scrutinize how the state doles out education money. In a recent report, the task force urged the state to solicit a study that would determine the going price for a decent education. The governor has supported their request, asking the state Legislature to

fund the project in the coming year.

The list goes on. All around the country, states are examining—whether through legal mandate or choice—what an "adequate" education will cost statewide, and what it will take to fundamentally alter current education finance formulas in a fair and reasonable manner.

## The REFC Will Keep 'Rural' at the Table

With all of this national attention, "rural areas are not prepared to win in the courts or the legislature, and are often left out or not at the table when decisions are finally made," according to Rural Trust policy director Marty Strange. The REFC intends to reverse this trend. It will keep rural education finance issues at the forefront, by:

- helping rural people and organizations act as responsible and effective advocates for equitable funding for all public schools serving rural communities;
- helping rural school leaders to address cost factors related to efficient

management of resources;

- sponsoring rigorous scholarly research on school finance issues that are particularly pressing for rural schools and communities;
- providing accurate information and competent support to rural people on current legal issues involving school finance systems; and
- monitoring and reporting on policy developments affecting rural school finance nationwide.

"The purpose of the REFC is not to promote any particular legislative solutions or get involved in the immediate politics, but to support more effective participation by rural people in these crucial decisions. It will do this by providing lots of good information, providing technical support on issues from law to finance to effective organizing, and by essentially being a one-stop clearinghouse for the rural perspective on school finance issues," said Strange.

The Rural Trust is currently searching for a Director of the REFC. A complete job announcement can be viewed online at [www.ruraledu.org/jobs.html](http://www.ruraledu.org/jobs.html). Applicants should send a cover letter and a writing sample to Christine Damm at the Rural Trust Policy Program, P.O. Box 68, Randolph, VT 05060; by fax at (802) 728-2011; or by e-mail to [policy.program@ruraledu.org](mailto:policy.program@ruraledu.org).

## Gipp Joins Rural Trust Board of Trustees

Gerald E. Gipp, Ph.D., Executive Director of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, was elected to the Rural Trust's Board of Trustees at its February meeting. Gipp, an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of Fort Yates, North Dakota, has an extensive background in American Indian education and policy. Under the Carter administration, he was appointed as the first Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Indian Education in the newly created U.S. Department of Education.

He also served for many years as the

program director for the Rural Systemic Initiatives Program with the National Science Foundation.

"The Rural Trust has been deeply involved with partners in Alaska, the pueblos of New Mexico, and the Navajo Nation in Arizona," said Jack Murrah, chairman of the Rural Trust board. "Gerry Gipp's vast knowledge of Native American education issues will be an important resource to the Board as the Rural Trust continues its commitment to improving Native education while honoring Native cultures and ways of knowing."



# Students Converge in Kearney, Nebraska for Student Extravaganza 2001

**M**ore than 300 students representing 15 states came together in Kearney, Nebraska for the fourth annual Student Extravaganza held on March 18–19. Sponsored by five high schools in Nebraska and South Dakota, the conference consisted of student-led workshops and entertainment centered on the annual conference theme of “*Small Towns, Big Dreams.*”

Students from Alabama, California, Georgia, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and Tennessee presented 22 workshops about projects going on in their small towns that exemplify what students can do to change and improve

their schools and communities. The two-day meeting provided a networking opportunity for the students to share, discuss and learn from each other.

For one group of students from Nebraska and South Dakota, the confer-

ence was more than a chance to share dreams with youth from around the country. For the 24-person Extravaganza planning committee, it was also the culmination of months of preparation. In charge of everything from designing a conference information website, to selecting presentations from the large pool of applicants, to making nametags, the group worked long hours to bring together the many aspects of the conference planning process to form a substantial two-day meeting.

“The students decided everything. I just sat back and enjoyed the conference.

## First Person

### *A Life Changing Opportunity*

# A First Person Account of Planning the Student Extravaganza

by Erika Rasmussen  
Senior, Hay Spring High School,  
Nebraska

On March 18, 2001, my life was changed (for the better) forever. I experienced the awesomeness of Student Extravaganza (S.E.). Don't feel bad if you haven't heard of it. I had no idea what exactly Student Extravaganza was until I was given the opportunity to help plan, present at, and serve as a keynote speaker for the big S.E.

To make a long story not so long, S.E. is a gathering of brilliant young minds in a relatively small space. Young people ranging in age from elementary to college share their work and experiences with each other by giving presentations and/or attending presentations. One very exciting feature of S.E. is that adult involvement is minimal; “kids” do most of the planning and presenting.

I learned some extremely valuable lessons throughout the duration of S.E. For

example, I learned that S.E. is a lot easier to type than Student Extravaganza! Seriously though, S.E. taught me about punctuality, procrastination, responsibility, dedication and most importantly communication. It also helped to further instill in me an overwhelming sense of pride in my community and school pride as well as pride in others and myself for the great things we have accomplished.

In my opinion, S.E. inspires and motivates people to make a difference in their surroundings. It demonstrates that if an individual identifies a need in their community or school, they shouldn't sit back and wait for somebody else to fill that need, they should get up, get out and get involved! Eventually, those people who were inspired by S.E. can someday pass on their knowledge to others. It's a vicious cycle!

I was very fortunate to be included in virtually every aspect of S.E. However, I was shocked when I was asked

to deliver a keynote speech. I was also very flattered. Being a keynote speaker made me realize that someone had noticed what I had helped to accomplish in my community and school and apparently, they liked it! I pondered what exactly I would talk about. With lots of encouragement from Robi Kroger, I decided to attempt to motivate the audience by telling our school/community “success story.” I was thoroughly nervous on the big day, but no one fell asleep during my speech, therefore I believe it too was a success.

I hope I have shed some light on the enigmatic S.E. I also hope I have aroused your curiosity. S.E. is a life changing experience that I will never forget. Over the course of three short days, I made friends that I will keep for life. If you ever have a chance to attend S.E. or be involved with it in any way, take that chance. It is a rare and awesome opportunity. If you don't enjoy it, you can kick me in the shin!

That's the way it should be," said Robi Kroger, one of the few adults that sponsored the students, along with teachers Mary Stangohr and Junia Meyer. "That's why this conference is so different—it's really student initiated and the adults are just supporting them."

The conference participants spent most of their days attending half-hour workshops, all of which left the students thinking about how what they learned could be applied to their communities. Workshops covered a range of issues from preserving local heritage to sustaining economic growth.

For instance, the "Roots Youth Community Garden" workshop presented a project from Tyler, Alabama in which middle school students are learning about the agricultural "roots" of their area. They are applying this learning to the hands-on experience of organic gardening on a local farming cooperative, where each student is given a small plot of land to plant seeds of their choice. "It's important to do plenty of research, like knowing the type of soil and planning around the growing season, before starting this project," suggested Terrence Williams, an eighth-grade presenter responding to a student in the audience who wanted to apply this project to his community.

In another unique workshop, students from Ojai, California presented "Honoring Diversity," centering on the Diversity Day they planned to encourage acceptance and challenge prejudices in their community. The Ojai group showed a video of the various components of their Diversity Day and led a group activity to test the participants' experience with discrimination. They ended with helpful advice and suggestions on how to begin similar programs in other communities.

Every student at the Student Extravaganza attended one of the "Student Forum" meetings, scheduled by the Rural Trust's newly selected *Youth Leadership Forum* (YLF). After breaking into groups, YLF members asked other students how they felt about student voice and student influence in their own communities and schools. The members of YLF, who range in age from 14 to 22, hope to use this and other information gathered at the conference to represent



*Clockwise from right: Youth Leadership Forum member Shiloh Goodin; Youth Leadership Forum members discuss their plans for their group within the Rural Trust organization; Students from Woody Gap High School in Georgia present their traditional Appalachian wares, produced through their Local Studies class. Photos courtesy of Barbara Cervone.*

youth from around the nation for the Rural Trust. "Students have a lot more capacity than most folks realize to be involved and share their ideas," said Cara Cookson, a YLF member. This was the first meeting for the group that will serve as a Rural Trust student advisory board for the next two years.

At the end of the two days, the con-

ference was deemed a roaring success by all involved. They all look forward to next year's celebration, scheduled to be held in Rapid City, South Dakota in March. The students who had come together near the Platte River of Nebraska went their separate ways, armed with "big" dreams and ideas to take back to the small towns of America.

## Youth Leadership Forum

The 15 students of the Youth Leadership Forum were chosen from the more than 30 young people who applied to represent youth for the Rural Trust. Their thoughts and insights about enlisting the talents and skills of youth in efforts to improve rural places were inspiring to all who had the privilege to read their applications. The students listed below will serve a two-year term.

|                 |               |                 |                 |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ernest Brooks   | Weldon, NC    | Morgan Matthews | Albion, CA      |
| Debra Brown     | Lubec, ME     | Kelly McCormick | Ojai, CA        |
| Cara Cookson    | Cabot, VT     | Saaneah Mjumbe  | Epes, AL        |
| Ryan Glanzer    | Carpenter, SD | Matt Pritchard  | St. Paul, VA    |
| Shiloh Goodin   | Mariposa, CA  | Maura Shader    | Morrisville, VT |
| James Griffith  | Lancing, TN   | Lauren Weaver   | Steamboat       |
| James Gutierrez | Las Vegas, NM |                 | Springs, CO     |
| Kelsey Harnist  | Philo, CA     | Kyle Wyatt      | Albion, NE      |

## ResourceCenter

# How to Get a Green Map Project Started in Your School

The Green Map System (GMS) has been used all over the world—a factor that has produced markedly diverse end results. Started in 1995 with the original *Green Apple Map of NYC*, the project has since grown to include more than 130 teams that have all contributed new ideas to GMS through each group's unique approach to mapmaking. Maps have been made by all sorts of groups, including governmental agencies, environmental organizations, designers and young students. Being involved in GMS has linked them all together, allowing for sharing of information and friendship among groups.

## Starting Your Project

GMS makes starting your own Green Map relatively simple. At their website, [www.greenmap.org](http://www.greenmap.org), information abounds on how to participate, the GMS "approach" and what other project sites have accomplished and how. Although they offer a range of support systems for the mapmaker and his/her team, they do not insist on any one method of creation. GMS welcomes new ideas and encourages interaction among all teams.

Before you begin, peruse the website for the "questions to consider" section, the introduction to the activity guide they provide once you become a member, and the "invitation to become a green mapmaker" section. Think about who is going to use your map, how you want to present it, what you want to use it for and how it will be distributed. Read about other teams and the answers they gave to those questions.

Mac Legerton of CCA notes that it is important to define the area you wish to map very carefully before you sign on to the project, and then "break it down

into manageable 'neighborhood' units for student investigation. Smaller maps help students learn more about their immediate environments."

When you are sure you want to start, contact GMS and they will send you the first part of an introduction to the project. Once you tell them more about your plans, goals and network, they will send the second part. It is the second part that includes the registration form with information on the Mapmakers Service Support Fees—a modest annual fee and a very small royalty based on proceeds generated from your project. GMS emphasizes that they "don't want the fees to be a barrier to participation, so 'scholarships' or service exchange are accepted instead of fees when needed."

The GMS guide includes sections on getting organized, setting the context and selecting sites, deciding the format and finding a base map, design and production considerations, publicity and distribution, funding and support development and related sources.

Legerton gives "high marks" to GMS, for their materials, mapmaking guidelines, icons and workshop assistance—all of which have made the process work very well for the program in North Carolina. Patricia Locklear of CCA said that providing teacher training was a very important part of the process and stressed that "teachers want and need as much training as possible to fully grasp what GMS can provide in terms of curriculum and end-of-course testing preparation."

## Working the Project into Your Curriculum and Garnering Community-wide Support

Place-based projects very often fit into more than just one area of study. As is evident in the work in Robeson County, the Green Map project is no different—it covers a wide array of studies, from art to history. With the future plans of the Robeson County project including the publishing of a book with photos and brief descriptions of every site identified, it is clear that making Green Maps can encompass curricula in most areas of study.

The fact that mapping projects are applicable to so many subject areas will gain you the most support from your community and school district. "A sustainable schools project must offer something to the school community that contributes to the core educational concerns. It's important to show how mapmaking can contribute to the fulfillment of standards in science, English, social studies, etc.," said Legerton.

The suggestion that your mapmaking project will give something back to the community and create a love of community in students also goes a long way. Legerton suggests using the Green Maps project to help institute service-learning programs and other community service-oriented offerings.

Producing Green Maps can be a rewarding experience for students and teachers, and a distinctive contribution to the community. The beginnings of a structure are already available to you, but it is up to you and your students to make the bulk of the creative decisions. Let the Green Map project open up their imaginations, and yours.

For more information, go to the Green Map website at [www.greenmap.org](http://www.greenmap.org); call (212) 674-1631; or write to Green Map System, Inc., 157 Ludlow Street, New York, NY 10002.



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 = ECO-TOURIST DESTINATION  
 = NOISE POLLUTION SOURCE  
 = ENVIRONMENTAL SCHOOL



## Students Map Robeson County from page 1

about their remembrances. In a county that is the most ethnically diverse rural county in the U.S. (1990 Census), with representation from African, Native, Hispanic and European Americans, there was much ground to cover. Students used local libraries and historical societies to confirm as much of the information as they could, and to research additional sites not mentioned by the elders.

The students then investigated the neighborhoods with cameras and notepads to describe the sites, and finished by placing the relevant numbers or icons on the base map. For the two maps done so far in Robeson County, students used numbers, rather than icons, to denote sites; soon the GMS icons and some locally-developed student icons will replace most of the numbers.

Once completed, the individual maps will not only serve to create a county-wide map with great value to the community and its visitors, but also as the basis for other publishing projects. The photographs taken of sites will be made into postcards and T-shirts, and photos and useful information gathered by the students will be published as a book. A traveling "kiosk" of the map will be made, to trek from school to school, and the map will be available on the web, allowing students to display their work, provide a convenient platform from which to discuss their community, and carry the story to a wider audience.

The maps are also being integrated into all of the place-based education efforts going on in the Robeson County schools, as an interdisciplinary curriculum reform tool. The maps are not just a vehicle for students to learn about and become aware of the positive aspects of their communities, but they are also a means of building upon coursework already happening in multiple areas. Teachers have identified areas of study in history, culture, art, social studies, political science and environmental science that will be changed in order to incorporate knowledge from the project.

## Getting Noticed

The Green Map project has received extensive media coverage locally and re-

gionally. Numerous articles have been published in the local newspaper, *The Robesonian*; an article was also recently written by the superintendent of schools in support of the project. This April, UNC-TV in Chapel Hill will be airing their documentary, *Something in Common*, a film featuring school-based projects in North Carolina as models of diversity in action. The Green Map project figures prominently in the film, with extensive coverage of a CCA summer training program for teachers.

As a remarkable result of all of this coverage, a local woman offered CCA five acres of land along the Lumber River at a dramatically reduced price upon learning of its projects. The organization plans to use the land as a local ecology center to promote the use and protection of the river and other resources of the region. The center will serve as a focal point for student Green Map efforts in the county, allowing them to explore the river watershed and participate in ecology-focused service learning opportunities.

## Positive Feedback

"Making the map has provided opportunities for students to work together successfully across racial and ethnic lines in a community context," said Legerton.

Learning about the positive aspects of their community has become increasingly important in Robeson County, a place that suffers from historical racial conflicts, negative stereotypes, and social and economic decline. "Place-based education has begun to heal the old wounds of racial conflict because adults and children alike are discovering that the positive attributes of their place are a result of its diversity," said Elaine Salinas, a steward of the Rural Trust.

During the place-based professional development training given to teachers last summer, a quiz was distributed to teachers, asking questions like: "How many swamps are there in Robeson County—20, 30, 40 or 50?" and "What is one species of fish commonly found in the Lumber River?" Legerton says that the quiz led to teachers "confessing their general ignorance of the resources of the county, and pledging to find more ways to integrate local ... knowledge into their courses." One teacher was quoted in *The*

*Robesonian*: "This workshop has shown that Robeson County does have a lot to offer. I had no idea." Even teachers not part of the project have seen renewed engagement of students in the learning process, and have expressed interest in utilizing the approaches in their daily curriculum.

Patricia Locklear, Projects Coordinator at CCA, also expressed astonishment at how little she knew until she began working on the Green Map project. "I've learned so much about the two communities in which maps have already been completed—areas that I don't live in. It is amazing what you can find going through records and speaking with some of the town's citizens."

## More than Just a Map

As each map is made, the number of converts to the side of community pride in CCA's crusade increases. "It's a very interesting, enlightening and educational experience," said student Caroline Sumtter after she completed the Red Springs map. She and her mapping partner, Hannah Sin, found an Indian burial ground among their sites, and enjoyed walking through the Flora McDonald Garden (named for the Scottish Jacobite heroine who fled Scotland for North Carolina after the Culloden massacre in 1746). "I had been there lots of times before, but [had] never learned about it until now," she said.

"People in my town refer to [our town] as 'Dead Springs,'" said Sumtter with frustration in her voice. She is hoping that the completion of the Green Map will help citizens of her community value their surroundings—and keep people from leaving the county. She is going to college in the fall to study hotel-restaurant management and hopes to bring those skills back to her town in order to open a bed and breakfast, and perhaps a restaurant, in a historical home.

Be sure to look her business up when you're in town in the coming years ... it'll be on the Robeson County Green Map.

For a copy of the completed maps or a progress update, contact Patricia Locklear of CCA at (910) 739-7851; mailing address: PO Box 723, Lumberton, NC 28359; e-mail at [cca@carolina.net](mailto:cca@carolina.net).



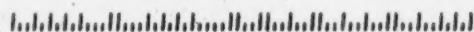
# Rural Roots

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**Hot Topic: Rural Trust to Establish  
Finance Center — See Page 3**

## Publications of Note

### Recent Rural Trust Publications

#### *A Reasonably Equal Share: Educational Equity in Vermont*

by Lorna Jimerson, Rural Trust Policy  
Program Coordinator

This report finds that Vermont's Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1997 (Act 60) has significantly improved educational equity in the state, and has achieved the three main goals established by the state's Supreme Court and Legislature: student resource equity, tax burden equity and academic achievement equity. The findings suggest that Vermont is on the right course in the way it funds its schools. Available free at [www.ruraledu.org/publications.html](http://www.ruraledu.org/publications.html), or by mail for \$5 including shipping. To order, send shipping address and check payable to "Rural School and Community Trust" to Rural Trust, 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006.

#### *Where Has All the 'Rural' Gone? Rural Education Research and Current Federal Reform*

by Topper Sherwood

This timely piece indicates the critical need for increased rural education research, particularly research with federal backing and monitoring. Sherwood points out the flaws in the education funding system that are making the rural education researcher an "endangered species" and provides suggestions for the Bush administration, rural organizations and community members, to change the course of research before it is too late. Available on the Rural Trust website, [www.ruraledu.org/publications.html](http://www.ruraledu.org/publications.html).

## Books

#### *Small High Schools That Flourish: Rural Context, Case Studies, and Resources*

Edited by Craig B. Howley  
and Hobart L. Harmon

This book discusses the general status of small rural high schools in the United States and why we should care about them. It then takes a closer look at four particular schools—all located in communities of very modest means—that are nevertheless flourishing institutions. The book also provides guidance to administrators and policymakers who would like to keep their high schools small, but must grapple with problems of funding, out-migration, personnel shortages, curriculum standards and accountability. A detailed resource section provides links to helpful organizations and publications that aid educators and community members in maintaining and improving their small high schools. This book can be purchased online at [www.ael.org](http://www.ael.org).

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# Rural Roots

*News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust*

## Arts Flourish on California's San Juan Ridge

Walking down the hallways of this k-8 school, it is apparent that the arts flourish here. Murals of the local natural world painted in science class, and silk-screened school mascot flags adorn the walls. Teachers use dance and song to bring ancient and modern cultures alive to students. Songs written in music class are broadcast to the community via local radio stations, and student paintings hang in local businesses. Students write biographies about local celebrities. Community members help teach classes using their unique backgrounds and knowledge. This is not an arts educator's dream, but a reality at Grizzly Hill School in North San Juan, California, where the arts are an integral part of the school's everyday curriculum.

Not long ago, however, this picture was a dream to the community members, teachers and students of Grizzly Hill. When the arts program at the school became a victim of budget cuts, parents sent their children to arts-focused charter schools far away and the school's enrollment declined. With the help of the Yuba Watershed Alliance (YWA) and funding from the Rural School and Community Trust, the school responded by resurrecting the arts program in an attempt to bring students back.

Today, the school is transformed. It is now a learning place that practices arts and culture in every classroom, becoming a model for schools across the county—and country—of arts integration across subject areas.

Diana Pasquini, place-based educator and site coordinator for YWA put it quite

continued on page 4



*Native American artist Lloyd Powell with student Troy Clark in the Native American art class.*

## Ford Grant Funds Equity Collaborative

The Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust)—in cooperation with the New Mexico Organizing Strategy, School at the Center (Nebraska), Challenge West Virginia, Southern Echo (Mississippi), Vermont Children's Forum and the North Carolina Justice Center—received a \$50,000 planning grant in April from the Ford Foundation. The group, called the Rural Eq-

uity Collaborative (REC), will together prepare a plan to improve the equity and adequacy of school finance systems for rural communities in high poverty regions of the country.

This grant will begin the process of building a unique partnership between the Rural Trust's Rural Education

continued on page 5

KC 023 245



## Rural Datebook

**July 22-25, 2001**

### International Conference on Rural and Community Development

Duluth, Minnesota

This conference is actually 3-in-1: the annual Community Development Society International Conference, the National Rural Development Leadership Conference, and the Minnesota Rural Summit.

Highlighting the theme, *The Times They Are A-Changing*, the conference will focus on building "outcome-directed" partnerships, involving business, government, tribal, non-profit, higher-education and citizen groups in strengthening rural and urban communities. Topics include: technology, diversity and inclusion, globalization, human services, rural/urban coalitions, and models for sustainable community development.

For more information and to register online, go to [www.mrs.umn.edu/2001summit/](http://www.mrs.umn.edu/2001summit/).

**July 23-27, 2001**

### Mapping Community Connections Summer Institute

Colby-Sawyer College in New London, New Hampshire

This summer institute is an introduction to community mapping for those who work with students at a secondary or middle school level. Participants will work through a mini-community mapping experience, supported by workshops on planning, assessment, technologies and "place discovery." Working with maps and spatial tools such as GPS and GIS, participants will be able to use fieldwork and primary sources to investigate local social, economic and ecological systems, identify and solve community problems, and develop enduring connections to place.

The institute, held from July 23-26 is \$395; stay until the 27th for the advanced GIS workshop for an additional

\$55. Price includes room and board. Registration deadline is June 22. Call toll free (877) 855-8467, or (802) 457-2779 to register; for more information, go to [www.communitymap.org](http://www.communitymap.org).

**October 11-13, 2001**

### Speaking with One Voice: A Conference on Education and the Environment of the Chautauqua-Allegheny Region

Roger Tory Peterson Institute and Jamestown Community College, Jamestown, NY

This conference aims to engage teachers, school administrators and community members in a vision for the future in which the natural world is key to a region's educational as well as ecological well-being. Keynote presenters and a panel discussion will feature regional and national experts on place-based education who will make the connection between educating children for ecological literacy and meeting school learning standards.

The registration fee is \$160 and does not include board. Register by September 27, 2001. Call (800) 758-6841 or e-mail [mark@rtpi.org](mailto:mark@rtpi.org) for more information.

**October 24-27, 2001**

### The 93rd Annual National Rural Education Association (NREA) Convention: "Rural Education—Celebrating Diversity"

Albuquerque, New Mexico (Albuquerque Marriott Hotel)

The theme of the NREA meeting is diversity, and one strand of workshops will be around place-based learning. Oscar Kawagley, co-director of the Alaska Rural Challenge/AK Rural Systemic Initiative, will be a keynote speaker.

Make room reservations at 1-800-228-9290. For more information, contact NREA headquarters in Colorado at (970) 491-7022 or go to their website at [www.colostate.edu/orgs/NREA/](http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/NREA/).

## Website Feature

The Stewardship Institute on April 3-5, 2001 was a chance for teachers and administrators from around the country to meet to discuss alternative ways of assessing the work of students in place-based education programs. Go to our website at [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org) for our in-depth coverage.



## Rural Roots

Vol. 2, No. 3

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ISSN 1532-642X

Rural Roots is published six times a year by the Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling.

Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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## What Lies Ahead for Rural Trust Network Sites in the Southwest

Almost 200 students, community members and teachers gathered near the flat-top mesas and burgundy-stained desert mountains of Glorieta, New Mexico on April 26–27 to participate in the Rural Trust's Southwest Regional meeting. Led by Southwest steward José Colchado, the meeting used the theme of "What Lies Ahead" to encourage Rural Trust network sites in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and southern California to learn from each other and together define the future of rural education in the Southwest.

During three, one-hour sessions over the two-day meeting, the group split into three strands—students, community members/parents, and teachers/administrators. The strands were designed to

their leadership skills and beliefs.

Site visits to Pecos Schools and the Santa Fe Indian School on the first day of the conference enabled participants to view and acknowledge the subtle—and sometimes noticeable—differences among their schools. The Pecos Independent School District is working to become the first dual language school district in the nation. With the understanding that learning both languages at a time gives students a considerable advantage, the district starts its students learning Spanish and English in first grade. Of the district's 850 students, 90 percent are Chicanos, nine percent are Anglos and one percent are African American or Native American. Conference participants were treated to special presentations all around the school. Some visited with Mrs. Ortiz's first grade class, and watched as they performed time-honored songs and *dichos* (Spanish traditional sayings with morals) learned in Spanish, English AND sign language, making her students trilingual.

Seeing firsthand how schools deal with diversity in the Southwest enabled one teacher to apply what he saw to his own school. "He said that he was committing to going back [to his school] and helping black youth become as connected to their culture as he saw Native Americans and Hispanics connected to theirs," said Colchado.

Serving 19 Pueblos of New Mexico, the Santa Fe Indian School is a residential school for Native American students. Conference participants heard



*Drummers from the Santa Clara Young Dance and Drum Group perform at the Santa Fe Indian School.*

from student presenters about school environmental projects and watched their PowerPoint presentation they designed, followed by tours of the school. In the evening, a traditional Pueblo meal was served while the crowd enjoyed line dancing by the senior citizens from Santa Domingo Pueblo and a performance of the Pueblo Buffalo Dance by the Santa Clara Young Dance and Drum Group. The dance and drum group started when a four-year old boy became concerned about Native children forgetting their culture and traditions. Now ten, he leads the drum group of youth ages four to 13.

After a second full day of workshops and another evening of song, dance and piñata battling, the meeting concluded with the sharing of thoughts about the meeting. At the final strand, participants wrote letters to themselves to reaffirm their commitment to act on what they had learned from the presentations, and from each other. In six months, those letters will be sent out to all participants, as a reminder of what they learned.

"We had a wonderful and rich exchange of ideas about how people are changing the way students learn. It always amazes people how diverse the Trust's work is, depending on the local needs and interests of the people in a particular community. The participants worked hard to gather ideas which they could take back to their own communities. And, they also played hard dancing, singing and sharing the Native American and Mexican cultures of the southwest," concluded Colchado.



*Students at the Southwest regional meeting focused on youth leadership. Troy Barner of the Ojai Valley Youth Foundation asks for volunteer presenters.*

give participants a chance to meet with others serving in similar roles in their communities, get to know and learn from each other, and together make a commitment to apply what they learned from others at the conference to their home communities. The youth strand concentrated on encouraging student leadership. The Ojai Valley Youth Foundation (California) led the students through a variety of exercises to improve



Postcard of the mural designed for the Environmental Elders project.

## Arts on San Juan Ridge

from page 1

succinctly: "[This is a story] of how one grant from the Rural School and Community Trust changed the climate of an entire school."

## A Community Valuing the Arts

Pasquini joined YWA to help Grizzly Hill enhance its arts program in the winter of 1997. Under her direction, many new music electives were offered, and a classroom was refurbished to be the state-of-the-art visual arts room. Although a wonderful beginning, it didn't feel like enough.

"It was obvious that something needed to be done. This community values the arts. Not only did we need to infuse the school program with art, but we had to do something with a big face on it so that people would take notice," remembers Pasquini.

The teaching team at Grizzly Hill, including Pasquini and music teacher Marc Ryan, decided to produce a holiday CD, incorporating two original songs written by the students in the school's new singing elective. A cover design was chosen through a school-wide contest; a logo was established for the school through another art contest. The CD was released in time for Christmas, and the title song, *Winter on the San Juan Ridge* was played on local radio stations:

*The roads are rusted.  
The Yuba's flooded.  
The trees are creaking, loaded heavy  
with snow.*

*My daddy's truck died,  
Down by the creekside.  
We've got to walk wherever we go.  
But Mama's singing  
Just as she's bringing  
Fresh homemade cookies, piping hot  
from the stove.  
I'm happy to the bone  
In my foothill home.  
It's winter on the San Juan Ridge.*

More than \$1,500 was raised through sales of the CD to community members. "That one project let the community know what this little rural school—and community—could create: something of fine quality that was durable," said Pasquini. "One key to achieving a viable arts program that lasts is that *everybody* can own it."

## An Environmental Focus

Recognizing the importance of integrating art into the curriculum and improving community involvement with the school, the school developed the "Environmental Elders" project. "This project uses the arts to communicate an idea; it also uses art as a means of honoring people," said Pasquini.

For this project, students worked in groups and shadowed local environmentalists (such as Gary Snyder, a professor, ecologist, Zen student and San Juan Ridge resident best known for his poetry) for almost a month. The students interviewed and wrote the elders' biographies, preparing a presentation about their work that included performing arts (dancing and playing musical instruments). The students honored the elders at a community ceremony, where they presented their

project and performed. The students also painted a mural about what they had learned, that included quotes from all four elders on each side of the design: "Envision a working habitat," "Nature is our mother," etc. Photos of the mural were printed as a school postcard, which sold so successfully, that it is now in its second printing.

Working with the elders to understand the work they had done to protect the region, the students developed a deep appreciation for the environmental uniqueness of the Ridge, and were able to express what they learned through art. "With this project, the students learned about something in their community and can tell people about their place through their art. They can express what they feel and what they learn through the performing and visual arts," said Pasquini.

The Environmental Elders project won an Excellence in Arts Education Award in 2000 for Distinguished Original Visual/Performing Arts Project, an award sponsored by the Nevada County Superintendent of Schools Office, the Nevada County Arts Council and Music in the Mountains.

While Pasquini was working on this and other programs, she was careful not to rely on the "art on the cart method" of teaching arts. "That's where people come in to the school, do their stuff, pack up and then leave." Although it's important not to be self-contained and to connect with other people and institutions, she says, "it's also important for the arts to be an integrated experience and not a separate curriculum area. That's what place-based education is: not learning by reading about something in a book, but by experiencing it," she said.

## A Cultural Educational Experience

The Grizzly Hill School is a "place-based school with a global perspective"—meaning that the school recognizes the need for its students to acquire cultural diversity education. To do this, the school brings the world's cultures to its students by using the arts.

"When artists visit, we learn about cultures in other parts of the world. Someday I might study these cultures in college and travel to these places," said Austin Dworaczky, a sixth grader.



Groups from as far as India (Gaden Shartse Tibetan Monks) and as close as home (Native Americans) have visited Grizzly Hill. The school's Native American project has received accolades from the local Title IX office, as well as increased funding to expand the program to other county schools, due to the impressive nature of its use of visual and performing arts in teaching about Native American culture.

A member of the San Juan Ridge community and Native American artist and educator, Lloyd Powell, spends time at the school teaching Native American art classes. The classes cover a series of projects, including sand paintings, totem poles and beading, all with the goal of teaching students about diversity. Pasquini and Powell also hope that students will learn that Native American culture is something that happens in the present, not the past. By continuing the learning experience with visits to the school from local Native Americans who share their culture through dancing and singing, students are able to make the connection between traditional and modern Native cultures. Here, the performing arts take over and students learn another means of arts expression.

"My family has been dancing for generations. I've been dancing since I was born...Dancing is an important part of my life because I want to keep up my family's traditions. I dance at my school to share our traditions so that people will know our history and understand who I am," said sixth grader, Jessica Growing Thunder.

### A Self-sufficient Program

Art is not just something that happens in the classroom in San Juan. Art is integrated into the community through regular displays at the North San Juan post office and the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center, among other local sites. The school and its students host "community sings," learn art from community members, design holiday note cards as a fundraising vehicle, host cultural events and work in partnership with several community nonprofits to help champion their cause through art. One instance of this is the special collaboration between Nevada County's Pet Adoption League and the school.



Cover design of the CD, *Winter on the San Juan Ridge*, by student Matt Light.

Students worked on the program called "Woof over my Head," in which they helped build doghouses and then wrote stories about a dog adoption.

The school's arts program is almost entirely funded now by the Twin Ridges District, thanks to the success of the program that started with one CD, during a winter season four years ago.

Kids at the school note their good fortune: "I think every school should have

singing, acting, dancing and music. Kids can have fun at school, not only at home," proclaimed eighth grader Kelli Gargill.

All Pasquini can do is nod, and hope that other students have the opportunities that her students at Grizzly Hill have. "There is a part of the whole person that does not develop when they don't have art," she said. "We know how important it is to integrate art across curricula—to use art as a medium of connection to the community, communication with one another, service to those around you, and, as a medium of..." she pauses. "...As a medium of joy. Just joy."

*As part of the Rural Trust's rural arts education planning grant, the organization planned regional meetings to solicit ideas and thoughts on arts education from students, community members and teachers. Pasquini attended one such meeting and used her expertise at the Grizzly Hill School to join the nationwide discussion. To learn more about the Rural Trust's plan for improving rural arts education, contact José Colchado by e-mail: jose.colchado@ruraledu.org.*

### Ford Grant

from page 1

Finance Center (REFC) and the six rural organizations of the REC, that are all based in communities prototypical of distinct rural regions of the country. All of the REC organizations have been successful in building constituencies of support for rural school improvement using research, communication and organizing strategies of their own. However, the REC was assembled with the understanding that working together on the vexing problems of school finance in rural places will bring a greater opportunity to effect change.

Working with the REFC, members of the REC share the common goals of:

- Achieving a policy setting in each of the six states in which all children have equal access to educational opportunity independent of where they live in the state, their color, language or level of wealth;
- Ending state school aid formulas that deny equal educational oppor-

tunity to children because they live in poor, remote places; and

- Generating schools that are well-maintained and located close enough to a child's home that travel time is limited according to principles of physical and mental health, readiness to learn, and geography.

The partners will develop individual, comprehensive state action plans that will: address grassroots public engagement of rural people in equity finance issues; assess the state school finance system; link an organized rural constituency to urban groups committed to equity; communicate rural issues to the media; and assess the state's school finance legal setting. Along with the individual state plans, the final proposal will include broad common objectives that will give national cohesion to the effort.

"We think of this as a challenge to organize effective campaigns for school finance equity in some states where an informed rural constituency can make a difference for all the kids—urban and rural—in the state," said Jack Murrah, Rural Trust Board Chairman.

## First Person

### *A First Person Account of the First Regional Getty Arts Meeting*

# Art Blooms in the Desert

by Maria Hernandez

Junior, Eldorado High School, Eldorado, TX

Follow a trail of sage green Saguaro, tangerine-tinted poppies, and butter-yellow coreopsis to the desert city of Tucson. A taut canvas washed with pastels stretches high above the oasis of Tucson while lavender tinged mountain peaks loom on each side. What could be a more picturesque site for a discussion of art?

It was here in this scenic location that a handful of the Southwest's most talented, problem-solving minds met to discuss the artistic needs of rural communities. I was lucky enough to have been chosen to be part of this gathering of dedicated educators, students and community members. My traveling partner was Esther Bunton, a concerned community member who loved to travel and who had my common interests. It was during our long drive from Phoenix to Tucson that I benefited from Esther's vast knowledge of wildlife and learned to tell the difference between coreopsis and California poppies.

Our goals and purpose were simple: identify the needs of rural communities and how best to bridge them. Of course, anyone who has ever attended one of the Rural Trust conferences knows that the seemingly straightforward prompts can be the most difficult. Fortunately, we were instructed to tear down the restrictions of reality and just dream.

Within our groups we discovered that many of us face the same problems within our small communities. There is always the handful of citizens who see art as merely a plaything, not of equal value to hard work in fields or on ranches. Or perhaps it is the small-town mindset that creativity is a product manufactured elsewhere, possibly in a big city like New York or San Francisco, or even Europe. And then there are always those who feel that the arts have no place in schools.

As I listened to ideas being tossed around, I discovered that I, too, had

acquired the small-town notion that opportunity lies elsewhere when it comes to music, writing or art. Personally, I had never been surrounded by so many art-enthused individuals who only wanted to encourage and provide opportunities. And it made me wonder how I could help my community and other students like myself by bringing back some of our ideas.

In every rural community there is a hidden artist, obscured either by his own will or the mere fact that no one ever took much interest. What if we found those people and asked them to teach a class on their specific area of art? Whether it's a grandfather who makes drums, an English teacher who likes to write poetry, or your grandmother who likes to quilt, all of these creative endeavors are art that deserve to be shown and taught to others. We don't need trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Boston Pops to experience culture. Within each town there is diverse and varied art that can expose us to the individuality of each ethnic group or family.

We decided that simple things like cross-curriculum studies (i.e. using art in history, etc.) could be used to expose students to culture. For example, Escher's art could be used in math class to illustrate math principles or world history classes could study the music, literature and art associated with each century of life. Perhaps junior high students could act in an original theater production written by high school students and learn about everything involved with putting on a production. They could experience every aspect from tech to building sets or the correct jargon used in direction. Schools or community centers could host summer art camps or workshops. Local businesses might agree to donate materials or space or money to the nurturing of arts in their community.

There are so many resources available in our communities that are just waiting to be tapped. All it takes is a little creativity to find them, approach them and receive some support. Whether it be money or supplies or instruction, any assistance is welcomed.

Of course, not everything that went on in Tucson was work. Whenever you bring together so many people from such varied backgrounds, you have to expect some socializing through stories, laughter. In my opinion that is perhaps the greatest feat of the Rural Trust organization. They enable students, educators and community members who hardly ever have the opportunity to experience new places and people, to travel and expose themselves to the ever-growing, ever-changing world.

Personally, I feel that my short stay in Tucson gave me a handful of new opportunities. The connections I made with others and the advice I was given from so many different people made me realize that there are no boundaries to my dreams. Just because I live in a small town doesn't mean that I have to give up my dreams of being a successful novelist (and maybe journalist) someday. I don't have to settle for less just because I haven't been handed opportunities. I learned that sometimes it is better to make your own opportunities, rely on your own self and face challenges head-on.

So as Esther and I drove away from Tucson Sunday morning, I felt a budding sadness deep in the pit of my stomach to be leaving such a wonderful environment of thinkers and artists. And then I saw the first golden blooms along the interstate and thought to myself, "That must be coreopsis."

*The Rural Trust received a planning grant from the J. Paul Getty Trust in February 2001 to plan a rural arts education program, Renewing the Color of Rural America. The Rural Trust started by organizing a series of regional meetings with community leaders, students and teachers to solicit their ideas on arts education in rural America. Their ideas will then be merged into a proposal for a national rural arts education program. Student Maria Hernandez attended the first regional meeting for the Southwest.*

# New England Students Challenged to "Take The Plunge—Make A Difference!"

by Helen Beattie, School Psychologist  
and Educational Consultant, Vermont Rural Partnership

More than 200 young people gathered at Vermont's Lyndon State College on April 3, 2001 to learn about the innovative ways in which students are taking on leadership roles in their schools and communities. Three years ago, Cara Cookson, a student involved in the Vermont Rural Partnership (VRP), attended the national Student Extravaganza in South Dakota and was inspired. She returned home and led the organization of the first East-coast version of this conference, held last spring. Because it was so well received, a group of VRP students decided to carry on the tradition by hosting the second annual Vermont Student Extravaganza.

General sessions included sixth through 12th grade students, while workshops (renamed "fun-shops") were tailored specifically to either middle school or high school ages. Fun-shop alternatives were diverse, yet with a common theme of *actively* engaging participants in learning. For example, one group of middle school students spent the day exploring their own leadership through a climbing wall experience, while another group created three-dimensional masks representing their leadership qualities. Yet another highly praised middle school session showcased a group of students who write and publish the only town newspaper. This session inspired several other schools to engage in similar work and has created a support network for such an undertaking.

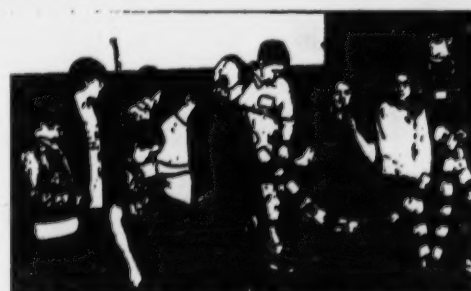
High school students also had many choices for exploring leadership opportunities. These included learning about the Harmony School in Indiana where students are central to decision making; a dynamic community service course at a local high school; and an individualized study program that allows students to link learning to their passion.

As a closing activity, participants created a paper chain, figuratively and

literally linking their reflections on what they had learned during the day and what they planned on doing back in their own schools and communities. The following quotes affirmed the power of the experience to both inspire and to serve as a catalyst for action:

## What I Learned:

- Even though we're all different, there's one thing that can bring us together. We're all leaders.
- Every voice can make a difference.
- [We can] break the barriers between adults and youth.
- You can do anything if you set your mind to it!



Students create a paper chain, linking their ideas about what they learned at the Vermont Student Extravaganza. Photo: Vermont Community Works ([www.vermontcommunityworks.org](http://www.vermontcommunityworks.org)).

- I learned that working together helps get things done.

Margaret Mead once wrote, "The further development of human society depends upon the existence of a continuing dialogue in which the young, free to act on their initiative, can lead their elders in the direction of the unknown... The children, the young, must ask the questions that we would never think to ask." The Vermont Student Extravaganza 2001 was a call to action—"Take the Plunge—Make a Difference!"

## Rural Trust Students Selected as Annenberg Scholars

Three students from Rural School and Community Trust network sites have been chosen to attend the first Wallis Annenberg Scholars program to be held at the University of Southern California from July 6–August 4, 2001.

Jarthy (pronounced Jar-lee) Monteroso from Ventura County, California, Luis Munoz from Schleicher County, Texas and Seth Fowler from Chase County, Kansas will attend the pre-collegiate program for students completing grades 10 and 11. The three will attend along with 24 other participants from Annenberg Challenge sites around the country, including Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and San Francisco.

"This is a great opportunity for Jarthy, Luis and Seth. It's also a great opportunity for urban students to learn about rural America from their peers," said Rachel Tompkins, President of the Rural Trust.

Each student will receive a laptop

computer at the beginning of the program, as well as a \$600 stipend and three college credits upon completion. Five seminars are offered to the students: art and architecture, engineering, introduction to film, media and politics, and news in a new media universe. Monteroso chose the engineering seminar, although her interests lie in art and video work. "I felt like I already knew something about the other subjects, and that engineering would be a challenge," she said. "I'm looking forward to going on the different trips, meeting new people and getting to know more about the school, teachers and campus."

Wallis Annenberg, daughter of philanthropist and former ambassador Walter Annenberg, developed the program to help enhance, motivate and inspire students involved with the Annenberg Challenge sites, to achieve higher academic, social and ethical standards.





# Rural Roots

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## Publications of Note

### *Exploring Ecoliteracy: Growing a Network for Community-Based Learning*

from the North Coast Rural  
Challenge Network

This booklet was written to inspire and support students and teachers, schools and districts to develop projects using the local environment as a meaningful context for learning. It offers a systems framework for project-based learning, project stories and teacher tools to support educators and community people in collaborating with one another—all based upon the outstanding work of the North Coast Rural Challenge Network (NCRCN).

For information, contact Kenneth Matheson, NCRCN Project Director, at (707) 937-5164 or e-mail [ken@mcn.org](mailto:ken@mcn.org); or, Deena Zarlin, NCRCN Mendocino

coordinator, at (707) 937-4750 or e-mail [dzarlin@mcn.org](mailto:dzarlin@mcn.org). This book is also available on the NCRCN website: [www.ncrcn.org](http://www.ncrcn.org). Click on "publications."

### *Community Lessons: Promising Curriculum Practices*

by Julie Bartsch (Rural Trust Northeast  
Steward) and contributing teachers

This book documents the community-based curricula used in several Massachusetts schools in a way that shows their rigor, relevance and powerful impact on both students and community. It also provides a curriculum lesson template that is engaging, easily replicable and includes standards and assessment methods for teachers wanting to connect their classrooms with the community. To order, contact Julie Bartsch via e-mail at: [julie.bartsch@ruraledu.org](mailto:julie.bartsch@ruraledu.org)

## Appalachian Studies Conference

The Rural Trust served as one of several cosponsoring organizations of the annual Appalachian Studies Association conference in Snowshoe, West Virginia, on March 29–April 1. More than 60 students, teachers, community members, and administrators from a number of Rural Trust network schools in the Appalachian region participated as presenters in the conference. Rural Trust president Rachel Tompkins presented the keynote speech. Linda Martin (pictured above), director of Challenge West Virginia and a member of the Rural Trust board, brought a team of staff and community members who spoke about the group's efforts to stop the wholesale consolidation of West Virginia's rural schools.



PHOTO BY ROB AMBERG

Volume 2, No. 4  
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# Rural Roots

*News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust*

*From Mud Puddle to Town Treasure:*

## Wetlands Estonoa Saved by Saint Paul Senior Ecology Class

Just a three-minute walk from the high school in St. Paul, Virginia, sits a wetlands no larger than an acre that has captured the attention of its town and its state. Saved from certain ruin, Wetlands Estonoa (Native American for "land of the blue waters") is the centerpiece of a town, the pride and joy of a handful of students and their school, and a noble justification for outdoor, science and place-based education, that has come to the attention of the state's governor and national environmental organizations.

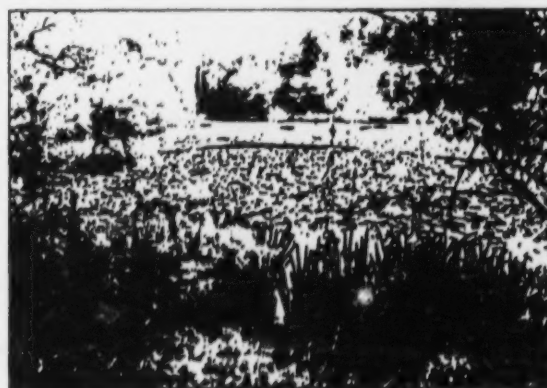


PHOTO BY ROB AMBERG

*Wetlands Estonoa, the result of all of their hard work.*

What some wanted to make into a parking lot, and others used as the unofficial town dumping ground is now a certified wetlands and town park, complete with picnic tables, gravel path and bridges, bat boxes and aquatic vegetation plantings. All of this happened this year, thanks to students in Terry Vencil's senior Physics and Appalachian Ecology classes, with help from local business owners and townspeople.

It has been just one year since this project was made public, and in that year, the students have accomplished

much more than physical beautification of the wetlands. This year the group has presented their project to many organizations from local Lions clubs to the Governor's Forum on Environmental Education. They raised funds and wrote grant proposals, soliciting both in-kind and financial donations. They worked with the Nature Conservancy to develop news releases and learned more about writing grant requests. They developed partnerships with local colleges, including Virginia Tech and Ferrum College, and also with Job Corps. In the midst of

all of this, they somehow managed to form friendships that will last a lifetime: "We're a family," says student Kassi Brooks.

### From Humble Beginnings...

It all started a short two years ago, when student Stevie Sabo chose the wetlands as his Appalachian Ecology class project. Sabo found that the area had once been a pristine, man-made lake, formed when two brothers dammed the

continued on page 6

## RuralDatebook

### October 11-13, 2001

#### Speaking with One Voice: A Conference on Education and the Environment of the Chautauqua-Allegheny Region

Roger Tory Peterson Institute and  
Jamestown Community College,  
Jamestown, New York

This conference aims to engage teachers, school administrators and community members in a vision for the future in which the natural world is key to a region's educational, as well as ecological wellbeing. Keynote presenters and a panel discussion will feature regional and national experts on place-based education who will make the connection between educating children for ecological literacy and meeting the learning standards to which schools are held accountable.

The registration fee is \$160 and does not include board. Register by September 27. Call (800) 758-6841 or e-mail 2001conference@rtpi.org for more information.

### October 11-15, 2001

#### 2001: An EE Odyssey— Exploring Capacity, Complexity and Culture

North American Association for  
Environmental Education's 30th  
Annual Conference,  
Little Rock, Arkansas

The conference will be built around four strands: 1) *capacity*: efforts to create sustainable EE organizations, leaders and programs; 2) *community*: working with community-based programs; 3) *complexity*: understanding the intricate ties that bind all together in the living systems of the globe; and 4) *culture*: working within the cultural context of different communities.

Early bird registration by August 31. Registration information available at [www.naace.org](http://www.naace.org).

### October 24-27, 2001

#### Rural Education— Celebrating Diversity

The 93rd Annual National  
Rural Education Association  
(NREA) Convention,  
Albuquerque Marriott Hotel,  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Topics to be discussed include: addressing cultural discontinuity via curriculum; inclusive school initiatives; place-based education; rural school reform models; teaching methods for diverse populations; and more. Dr. Oscar Kawagley, co-director of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (a Rural Trust network site) will be a keynote speaker at the kick-off banquet.

Make room reservations at 1-800-228-9290. For more information, contact NREA headquarters in Colorado at (970) 491-7022 or go to their website at [www.colostate.edu/orgs/NREA/](http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/NREA/).

### October 28-30, 2001

#### Rural Trust Midwest (Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota) Regional Meeting

Benedict Center, Schuyler,  
Nebraska

Contact Barbara Poore at (712) 526-2044, or by e-mail at [barbara.poore@ruraledu.org](mailto:barbara.poore@ruraledu.org).

### November 4-5, 2001

#### 23rd Annual Rural and Small School Conference

Presented by the Center  
for Rural Education & Small  
Schools, and the College of  
Education at Kansas State  
University, Kansas State University,  
Manhattan, Kansas

Presentations will highlight current research or exemplary programs involv-

ing rural education. Emphasis on leadership, technology, school-to-work, standards-based education, and practices that enhance classroom learning, increased achievement, address cultural and language diversity and promote connectivity with the community. For more information, go to <http://www2.educ.ksu.edu/organizations/cress/> or contact Barbara Havlicek at (785) 532-5886, e-mail [barbhav@ksu.edu](mailto:barbhav@ksu.edu).



## Rural Roots

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Rural Roots is published six times a year by the Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling.

Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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## New Grants Build on Annenberg Funding

In 1995, the Annenberg Rural Challenge set out to find, and then fund, high-quality place-based education efforts going on around the country. Six years later, Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust) network sites in 35 states routinely perceive that the Annenberg funding has "opened doors." The sites have found that their programs receive more support from the community. Their ability to expand upon the programs already in place has improved. Most importantly, program funding has continued through new relationships with grant-making organizations. Three recent grants to Rural Trust network sites in South Dakota, Nebraska and Pennsylvania demonstrate that involvement with the Rural Trust can lead to bigger things.

### Community Revitalization in South Dakota

In February, the Miner County Community Revitalization (MCCR) signed a 10-year partnership agreement with the Northwest Area Foundation (NAF), a regional philanthropy dedicated to reducing poverty.

MCCR was the first organization of an estimated 16 other communities to be approved for the NAF "Community Ventures" program; MCCR will receive \$5.8 million over ten years. Funds will be used to implement the community plan and vision developed by more than 100 residents of Miner County. The plan is aimed at reducing poverty, stabilizing the population, and developing the local economy through collaboration and sharing by those who live or work in Miner County.

Randy Parry, MCCR's Executive Director, believes that the impetus for community change began with the involvement of the schools with the Rural Challenge: "If it weren't for the Challenge, we wouldn't be where we are today. By first involving people in the educational process, they were able to see that they really could evolve and make a better life

for all of those living in the county—through their own work."

### Small Business Creation in Nebraska and South Dakota

Two Rural Challenge sites—School at the Center in Nebraska and Black Hills Special Services Cooperative in South Dakota—realized early on that they shared very similar economic and cultural conditions, and that working together made sense. It was with this understanding that Jerry Hoffman of School at the Center and Curt Shaw of Black Hills began their collaboration on the first Student Extravaganza in 1995. The relationship between the two organizations has now matured into an enduring joint venture, as they continue

to pool their resources in order to identify young people as contributors to the sustainability of their communities.

They are now in the second year of their newest project together—a three-year, \$147,000 grant from the Hitachi Foundation to engage rural youth in small business creation and entrepreneurial training. Their youth entrepreneurship program hopes to stem the population drain afflicting the two states' rural communities, a problem often attributed to a lack of economic opportunities. "The Hitachi grant is bringing the regional collaboration that started with the Rural Challenge to the next level," said Hoffman.

This year, the program will engage rural youth in four South Dakota and two Nebraska communities in small business creation; the goal is to reach 10 communities in each state by the end of the three years. Shaw starts with each group by conducting "Entrepreneur Institutes"

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### *New Board Executive Committee Named*

## Johnson Joins Rural Trust Board of Trustees

Leroy Johnson, Executive Director of Southern Echo, Inc., was elected to the Rural Trust's Board of Trustees at its June meeting. Johnson brings to the Board his extensive experience in community grassroots organizing, training and youth leadership development. While at Southern Echo, he has developed a community-based conflict resolution training program; created the Mississippi Education Working Group, a collaboration of parents around the state pushing for an equal and high-quality public education system; and worked to strengthen the state's legislative black caucus.

A former farmer and community organizer, Johnson has worked to bring African Americans to the forefront of political change in the Mississippi Delta. "Leroy Johnson sees education as a powerful force for social justice in the rural African-American

communities of Mississippi," said Rachel Tompkins, President of the Rural Trust. "Through his work with Southern Echo, he has been a tireless advocate for education policies that foster citizen involvement and local control, and that support and defend the rights of parents and students. His passionate voice is an important addition to our Board."

Also at the meeting, the Board named a new Executive Committee. Arthur Campbell, Vice President, Economic Development with the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta was named Chair; John Zeglis, President, AT&T and Chairman & CEO, AT&T Wireless remained Vice Chair; Linda Martin, Education Coordinator for Challenge West Virginia was named Secretary; and Mollie Hale Carter, Vice President of Star A. Inc. became Treasurer.

# Murrah Reflects on Six Years of Rural Trust



*Communications Director Kathy Westra interviewed Jack Murrah, President of the Lyndhurst Foundation and founding chair of the Rural Trust's Board of Trustees, on June 29, just after Murrah completed his final board meeting as chair. In the interview, Murrah reflected on his years of involvement—from the Trust's beginnings as the Annenberg Rural Challenge, to its current incarnation as the Rural School and Community Trust.*

**KW:** Back in the beginning, the Annenberg Foundation hadn't really thought about rural schools. You were instrumental in changing that thinking. How did you make the case, and why did you think it was so important?

The Annenberg Challenge was announced to the world at the end of '94. At that time, there wasn't any mention of what the focus would be, whether it would be urban or rural or regional or whatever, so it seemed a fairly open-ended opportunity. I simply wrote a letter to the foundation saying that there was an interesting stream of work that the Lyndhurst Foundation had been associated with for 7–10 years down in Alabama [the PACERS program], to which we had made a significant commitment for the next five years. And I said if they were looking for financial partners—partners with some experience in specific communities around the country—that we would be very interested in having a conversation with them.

Following the initial announcement, a further [one] was made that [the Challenge] was going to focus on the large cities—urban districts that were places of maybe the greatest challenge for the success of public education. To be honest with you, I assumed that meant that they wouldn't be inviting me back.

**KW:** But we know now that they did.

Yes, sometime in the summer of 1995 I got a call from Barbara Cervone, the person coordinating this initiative at Brown University, who said she had gone through some 2,000 letters [from people interested in being part of the Annenberg Challenge], and that there had been two

letters that spoke of work in rural places that caught her eye. One of them was my letter. And it had made her think about whether or not the Challenge ought to be thinking about work in rural America. She asked me if I would come to a meeting to talk about it. I and about a dozen people met to talk about a national rural initiative that would address the needs and opportunities in rural America—that broad spectrum of the nation that was largely invisible to the national press. We talked about [how it] would require a different kind of effort than could be made in a concentrated urban place.

**KW:** Was it a hard sell? Was "rural" just so far off people's screens that they needed convincing? Obviously, you made a good case....

I think Barbara was sympathetic to the issue the moment that she heard it. I can't account for that, but it appeared to me that she had already decided that if there was a way to craft a credible initiative, that she would be willing to be an advocate for it. The other people around the table were all able to speak to the existence of good work that was going on. I think the big issue in some ways was: "Is there enough here that you can build upon? Is there enough work that has coherence, or [a] philosophical, definable character that you could say this is going to be an initiative rather than simply a wild throw of darts at a large national map?"

**KW:** So what happened next?

I think probably the biggest single thing that happened at that meeting was

the shift from "this is a very small piece of the Annenberg initiative" to "this should be a sizeable piece of the Annenberg effort." The numbers shifted from about \$5 million to \$50 million. I think that \$5 million starting figure probably reflected just how new that idea was, and how unknown the territory was. I won't speak to the long events and many twists and turns that occurred over the following months, but ultimately a Board was asked to serve, and a proposal was drafted, and submitted to the Annenberg Foundation.

**KW:** What were the biggest challenges of this time?

There was a profoundly unsettled issue that I think probably cast a long shadow over the early years of the Rural Challenge. The planning committee was coming up with exemplars of rural work—rural initiatives that ought to be the initial participants in the Annenberg rural program. I think there were 14 initiatives. They included everything from a graduate school of English that focuses on preparing individual teachers to teach writing effectively in rural settings (the Bread Loaf School of English), to the PACERS program, which is engaged in whole-school change, and specifically [working on] efforts to reconnect the schools to the life of the community. So these were both narrowly and broadly gauged initiatives, but they were identified as exemplars, and as the initial founding participants in the Rural Challenge.

**KW:** So not everyone agreed on this approach?

Well, it was a major philosophical struggle we had early on. Should we concentrate the initiative and the resources behind it on the already identified exemplars and try to take them to a place of significantly greater stature, quality of work, scope of work, etc.?

Another school of thought was that these initial exemplars were merely spots on the ground from which we could build, and [we had] to do an exhaustive search for other interested parties who could bring more children into the benefit of this initiative. Those were some of the early tensions over what the scope of the work was, what

the intent of the work was, what the fruit of the work would be. In retrospect, I think we balanced that out pretty well.

*KW: When you succeeded in getting Annenberg support—to the tune of a challenge grant for \$50 million—what were your thoughts about raising an equal amount and then spending so much money in just five years? Wasn't that an absolutely daunting challenge?*

If there's a word that exceeds "daunting," put it in! It was incredibly challenging for us to imagine how we would secure the match and how we would use the resources in a responsible way, because it was a really short time. There were no other dollars committed to this work, and very few donors that we knew of who were willing to put other dollars on the table.

*KW: My recollection is that the Lyndhurst Foundation, through your good offices, put some money on the table in the form of a loan so things could get started....*

We provided a loan simply to establish an operation, because we had no resources with which to hire a director or establish an office or do any of the initial steps that had to be taken before we could mobilize a rural initiative. Yes, we did that. And then the Annenberg Foundation did a very helpful thing when they said that we could use money that had been raised in the last year by those 14 initial partners as a kind of dowry that they would accept as money that had been put up to match the Ambassador's gift.

*KW: So, a lot of the matching money was raised in these small communities?*

Yes, and that turned out to be one of the most positive things. Even if we had been able to raise \$50 million in grants from large foundations around the country, in the long run it would have left communities with a greater sense of dependency and less sense of how to sustain their work than they have today. The good of it is that I think we did build a relationship with and inspire habits and dispositions in communities that leave them better prepared to keep their work going forward. And that's a really important achievement.

*KW: Talk to me a little bit about "hard places"—rural places of great need that could benefit from support and place-based education programs.*

I think that our work in "hard places" will be the biggest payoff in the long run. Those are the places where this kind of education could be of extraordinary value, but we knew we could not simply find it and support it. We would have to help people get to it, and we would have to start with where they were—

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democracy."**

what their struggles were, what their circumstances were. That is much harder work to do—to actually have to help in coming up with a plan to do place-based education. It's patient work that doesn't produce immediate payoff. And it's the most important work in the long run if what you're really trying to do is improve the state of rural education throughout the country. I can't see anything less that we should aim for.

*KW: What has been the most inspiring part of this work for you?*

Some people always answer that question with something that talks about people—human beings that inspired you and helped you get up in the morning and try again. Then there's another kind of answer that focuses on the inspirational quality of the ideals—the ideas themselves.

I'm the kind of person who has to say both those things. I would not have been as ardent in my efforts to make this initiative successful unless I profoundly believed that we have a set of principles at work that are sound and are consistent with moral values, political values, and beliefs about community and democracy. Those big words are important to me. I am driven by a commitment to value-laden principles. But that alone isn't enough unless you see that it's real, and where it gets real is in specific places. My inspiration comes from seeing good people do good work inspired by good principles.

*KW: So what's been the most difficult thing?*

It was a real mental challenge for me to grasp and begin to articulate the scope and depth of what this work is about. I went there willingly, but it was with difficulty that I mastered the conceptual level of our work. The things that have been hard that are memorable are the things that are about getting to the richness of this kind of work.

*KW: You've convinced the Lyndhurst Foundation to commit an extraordinary amount of money to the Rural Trust to support its future work. How do you see that investment "paying off" for rural schools through the work of the Trust?*

I hope that every year, as we go forward, there are more schools and communities that see themselves as a part of the Rural School and Community Trust, doing work that they have undertaken with a sense that it is connected to a larger body of work across the country—a network of school and community reform. The second piece is for every place, every year, to feel that they are doing the work better than they were before. That the skills in the community, among the civic and political leadership, the skills in the schools, among the teachers, and the skills particularly among the students have grown an inch or two. That they themselves [the sites] have a deeper understanding of what it is that they are about. That they acquired the skill and the disposition to take stock honestly of how they are doing, and set a target for the next year to do more.



## Wetlands Estonoa

from page 1

main water source of their cornfield to create a swimming hole. The lake became the center of town activity, not only used for swimming, but for fishing and even baptisms. Over the years, the lake filled in with dirt, debris and trash, and Sabo believed that the lake should be restored to its original glory. The following year, student Nikki Buffalow adopted the project. It was she who realized the lake could not be returned to its former form, because the area had turned into wetlands, a land-type that could be protected through U.S. law.

So started this unique project in Vencil's student-led class—a class offered as the fifth day of a weeklong physics course during first semester and a full-time class for second semester. As student Sareh Baca put it: "I thought it was a great way of getting out of a day of physics...but it turned out to be much more than that." Students ended up putting in—voluntarily—15–20 hours a week on the project, devoting many weekend and evening hours to learning and working on Estonoa.

### A Distinctive Classroom Experience

At the group's presentation given at the Rural Trust's Appalachian Regional Conference, Vencil asks her students, "Who runs this Appalachian Ecology class?" There is a resounding, "We do!" as students joyfully answer.



Students Morgan Rudder and C.C. Fields hard at work on the land of Wetlands Estonoa.

"Learning is a cooperative thing with our teacher," said student Morgan Rudder. "All of our projects are student initiated and student run. We have Ms. Vencil, but she's more like a friend than a teacher because she just kind of helps us out. We ask her to do something [to help us], and she does it; it's not always the other way around."

This type of active learning was not always Vencil's approach. "I came into [education] as a bench chemist. When people told me I had to start doing place-based science, I said, 'There is no way I can incorporate place-based science into bench chemistry.' Well, I was very wrong," said Vencil. "I cover my SOLs (Virginia's state Standards of Learning), but I don't have to do it through rote learning."

In the students' PowerPoint presentation, one of the first slides has the phrase: "Where do we start? I can't do it." to emphasize their teacher's initial aversion to using place-based science in her classroom. "Now she's become, like, the place-based queen," remarked Rudder.

### Getting Their Feet Wet

The class got their feet wet, quite literally, with place-based learning when they started examining nearby Lick Creek, a water source to the Clinch River, using SOS (Save our Streams) and GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations for the Environment) monitoring systems. SOS is a way of evaluating a stream's quality by calculating the number and kinds of macroinvertebrates in the stream. "It's really fun—you get to get in the creek and look for little macroinvertebrates and wear these big, clunky waders," said Rudder.

GLOBE allows more than 10,000 students, teachers and scientists from all over the world to network

and share data with each other. In May of this year, St. Paul High School became GLOBE certified, after the Appalachian Ecology students and science teachers took GLOBE-sponsored Saturday training workshops that covered water quality, land coverage, atmosphere and soil. The students also took Saturday field trips in their area that reflected their classmates' interests and projects, including spelunking, water treatment and

**"Everyone finds something in the class that they truly love that they can concentrate on."**

— TERRY VENCIL

monitoring, and other activities.

Learning about and sustaining Lick Creek is directly related to the students' work with Estonoa—the two are parts of the extremely diverse Clinch River watershed. According to the Nature Conservancy, the Clinch River area sustains 48 imperiled and vulnerable species, including 29 varieties of rare mussels and 19 species of fish. Rare plants, mammals and birds also thrive along the river's edge. All told, the river and surrounding valley are home to 27 species that are federally listed as threatened or endangered.

"The United States is the world leader when it comes to the variety of animal life found in our rivers, and the Clinch is one of the most ecologically important rivers in the country," said Brian Richter, director of the Conservancy's Freshwater Initiative, an international effort to protect freshwater systems.

### Three Phases of Development

The students' broad understanding of watershed management is manifested in their specialized attention to Estonoa. They split the process of cleaning up the wetlands into three phases. The first two phases are completed; they have cleared out non-wetland plants, formed a walkway around the waters, cleared out the trash and barrels, introduced aquatic species, installed foot bridges and pic-

nic tables, and started to thin the lily pads that are so thick, they deplete the water's oxygen supply, making life difficult for fish. Reluctant to use pesticides, the students are having trouble coming up with an environmentally safe way to thin those lily pads short of getting into the water themselves and pulling them out by hand. They confronted a similar problem when poison ivy began sprouting up around the water. To avoid using harmful chemicals, they plan to enlist the help of a couple of goats.

Just in the beginning stages, the third phase of their plan is the building of a two-story learning center on the land next to Estonoa. Students at the Virginia Tech School of Architecture presented three designs of the proposed educational facility that would store learning materials, provide classroom space and have an observation deck. They plan on using solar panels and other environmentally friendly building products as a means of continuing their commitment to the environment. The students hope the learning center will be used to teach classes to younger grade levels, host a summer camp and conduct on-site research.

### More Than a Science Class

While working to improve the wetlands, the students have dealt with changing the town's attitudes, working with other class levels within the school, writing grants, obtaining land easements, forming a governing board and working with the town council. They created many "scrapbooks" or portfolios that document every single move they have made, including a media and contact directory, their budget and monetary plans, grant requests, student reflections and photos, presentations, and legal papers. This class entitled "Appalachian Ecology" is much more than that. The students have worked on legal, political and social issues, all while concentrating on biological improvements.

"There are not many classes that teach social interaction. These kids have had to deal with people who live around the area—people who for years were dump-

ing trash in the lake. You can't just go up and knock on their door and say, 'You can't do that.' You have to figure some way to socially schmooze them a bit,"



Members of Team Estonoa with teacher Terry Vencil.

said Vencil. She told a local newspaper, "They don't mind doing it. One of their mottoes is, 'Be friendly, keep smiling and stay in their faces.'"

'Stay in their faces' is an understatement. The students have presented their project dozens of times to community organizations, the town council and nonprofit national meetings. One of their more high-profile presentations was to the Governor's Forum on Environmental Education. As the only student presenters at the conference, "we blew everybody away," said Rudder. "We were the only organized group there, and the only group with a PowerPoint [presentation]." It's the students' superior skills, such as mastering computer software, and their mature attitudes that get people's attention—and money.

The class raised thousands of dollars, with donations or grants from local churches, the county Board of Supervisors, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and the state's environmental endowment. In-kind donations have included plants and volunteer time (from people like TVA biologist Doug Lieb and Ferrum College students).

### The Benefits of Team-Based Work

The experience of working with Estonoa has allowed many students to

recognize and highlight their unique gifts and contributions. Each student has an area to concentrate on, from directing the GLOBE program to managing publications. "Everyone finds something in the class that they truly love that they can concentrate on. This class works for all kids because [they're] given the opportunity to do what they want and do it well. They're treated as if they have worth and what they say has worth," said Vencil.

C.C. Fields, a student organizer with the project, realized his career goals while working on Estonoa. "Working on this project pointed me in the right direction. I realized that I want to pursue forestry and work outdoors," he said.

For other students, working on the project has helped them gain self-confidence and pride. "I've always been worried coming from a small school, that when I got to college, I would be kind of blown away by my peers who have had all these AP courses and all that stuff—opportunities that I haven't had. I figured I would just flounder. But, now I feel as prepared as anybody, because, I mean, how many people do you know that know how to write a grant? How many teenagers do you know that have presented to all these people and done all of these things?" said Rudder, the public relations and PowerPoint manager.

### Saying Goodbye

The students have put a lot of time and effort into the planning of the future community learning center. But, that project and others will have to be passed on to next year's Appalachian Ecology class. This year's senior students have put so much of themselves into this project, they are having a lot of trouble handing it over. "I've fallen in love with this project...giving it up is going to be awful," said Baca. And Vencil tears up thinking about it: "I'm hating for [them] to give it up." For now, the class of 2001 will have to be content with single-handedly developing an old, forgotten "mud puddle" into the treasure of an entire town and community.

## ResourceCenter

# How to Make the Outdoors Your Classroom

Today's children spend very little time outdoors. At home, television and video games often take the place of pick-up softball games and afternoon bike rides. And at school, teachers are sometimes wary of taking their class outside for a variety of reasons. Yet, research shows that outdoor education helps students to develop leadership qualities, foster a sense of place, improve learning through direct, first-hand experiences and improve overall achievement. (See *Closing the Achievement Gap: Using the Environment as an Integrating Context for Learning* by G. Lieberman, available through [www.ael.org/eric](http://www.ael.org/eric).)

Acknowledging that, teachers then face a broad spectrum of questions: "Where would we go? How do I keep control of the class? How do I work this into the curriculum?" Fortunately, a wealth of resources are available for the teacher interested in making outdoor learning a part of his/her everyday curriculum.

### Spaces for Learning

As demonstrated with the crew from St. Paul High School and their Wetlands Estuaries project, school grounds (or land close to the school) can be incredible learning spaces. "Every school's grounds are potential educational spaces where concepts taught within the school building can come alive to students," writes Cheryl Wagner in the pamphlet *Planning School Grounds for Outdoor Learning* available from the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities ([www.edfacilities.org](http://www.edfacilities.org)).

Having trouble thinking of ways of learning outside within school grounds? In *Five Minute Field Trips*, authors Sue Arlidge and Gareth Thomson list over 30 activities for teaching about nature on school grounds for grades 1-6 (call (780) 447-9400 to order).

Another useful resource is *Greening School Grounds: Creating Habitats for Learning* available from *Green Teacher Magazine*. It includes dozens of activity ideas from past magazine articles with step-by-step instructions. Some areas covered include butterfly gardens, pond and prairie restoration and school composting ([www.greenteacher.com](http://www.greenteacher.com)).

Although incorporating outdoor learning into your curriculum is perhaps easiest on school grounds, other location options are limitless. For instance, time spent walking around your town and your town's landmarks, businesses, homes, roads and shops can contribute much to your curriculum, be it science, art, history or English. Local parks, outdoor learning centers and rivers or other water sources are also valuable learning spaces that can span subject areas.

The biggest step is deciding to move your class outside. Where you decide to go is less important than what you choose to do with the precious time spent outdoors and how you integrate it into your curriculum.



PHOTO BY BOB AMBERG

### A Part of the Curriculum—Resources

"While wetlands and other natural areas may be environmentally beneficial in general, on school grounds their true value emerges only through their integration into the school's overall educational program," writes Wagner.

Websites to check out for curriculum ideas:

- The National Wildlife Federation's *Schoolyard Habitat Program* provides a kit for converting your grounds into natural habitats, specific curriculum ideas, and a listserve to converse with the nearly 1,500 other schools involved in this effort: [www.nwf.org/habitats/schoolyard/index.html](http://www.nwf.org/habitats/schoolyard/index.html).
- The Environmental Protection Agency provides teachers with an online environmental education center that lists curriculum and community service ideas, and grant information at: [www.epa.gov/teachers/](http://www.epa.gov/teachers/).
- The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) sponsors [www.eelink.net](http://www.eelink.net), a website that provides classroom resources, professional resources specifically for teachers, and grant information.
- The Center for Environmental Education lists a tremendous number of educational resources, curriculum ideas and activities at: [www.cee-ane.org](http://www.cee-ane.org).
- The National Gardening Association's [www.kidsgardening.com](http://www.kidsgardening.com) has school greenhouse guidelines, a teacher's resources "room," grant updates and a school garden registry that includes more than 1,000 schools with which to network.

These sites focus mostly on science and environmental education. However, it is important to note that other curricular areas can benefit from time spent outdoors, or can be piggybacked onto learning going on in other classes or subject matters. For instance, a class trip to woodlands in your area will incorporate science (identifying trees or animal tracks and discussing environmental sustainability), English (students reflect upon their experiences or write a story based on what they learned), art (students draw or paint what they see while on location,



perhaps to help identify local plant, bird or insect species), math (students calculate tree heights), and more.

Some books to check out, available through your local or online bookstores unless otherwise noted:

*In Accord with Nature: Helping Students Form an Environmental Ethic Using Outdoor Experience and Reflection*, by Clifford E. Knapp demonstrates how educators can help middle-school age and higher level students understand and define their relationship to nature and learn the importance of protecting the environment. Knapp provides alternative teaching strategies and structured activities to help connect students with their world. To order, call AEL at (800) 624-9120 or email [aelinfo@ael.org](mailto:aelinfo@ael.org). The book is \$19.

*Natural Learning: Creating Environments for Rediscovering Nature's Way of Teaching*, by Robin C. Moore and Herbert H. Wong is based on ten years of research and community development. It illustrates how to create a child-centered educational institution based on community participation, environmental education and ecosystem health. Learn how to naturalize your schoolyard and transform it into an outdoor classroom. Find endless and innovative ways to teach the basics and expand your curriculum into outdoor settings. The book is \$29.95.

*Taking Inquiry Outdoors: Reading, Writing, and Science Beyond the Classroom Walls* by Barbara Bourne for \$17, was published in 1999.

*Teaching in the Outdoors* by Donald, William and Elizabeth Hammerman is \$32.95. Most recently published in 2001 and first published in the 1970s, this book is a good rationale of outdoor education and includes techniques and procedures.

### Tips for Taking Kids Outdoors

*Green Teacher Magazine's* most recent issue has an article by Nalani McCutcheon and Andrea Swanson entitled *Tips and Tricks for Taking Kids Outdoors* with some great ideas to help teachers who fear teaching outdoors. The following is just a sampling of some suggestions by the two authors. For the full article and more tips go to [www.greenteacher.com](http://www.greenteacher.com) for ordering information; the article is in Issue 64, Spring 2001.



PHOTO BY ROB AMBERG

**Plan the logistics.** Plan on allowing students to take turns leading group walks or activities. Provide opportunities to run and be active. Give specific assignments to help focus the group's attention. Evaluate your time together when you return and discuss what went well and what didn't—to better plan for the next trip outside.

**Be flexible.** "The turkey vulture soaring overhead or the rabbit running across the trail may interrupt your lesson, but accept that it is a natural attention magnet for students. . . They are the moments your students will likely never forget, and if you can bridge these spontaneous events to the lesson at hand, you will likely cement the learning," write the authors. Although it's important to plan ahead and have a lesson plan in mind, never ignore those learning opportunities that can happen when outdoors.

**Empower yourself.** "Just as an athlete takes time to practice on a new field before a competition, so too must teachers take time to establish a personal comfort with the new learning environment," write McCutcheon and Swanson. Part of planning ahead is visiting the place you intend to take your students beforehand, and thinking through your lesson structure, class size, or what additional help you will need.

### Your Comfort Level is Defined by You

With enough planning and trust in yourself and your students, your outdoor education lessons will be extremely rewarding. A final reminder from the authors of the *Green Teacher* article says it all: "Remember that your level of comfort is not built by your classroom walls, it is built within your mind."

## Outdoor Education

"Outdoor Education means learning in and for the out-of-doors. It is a means of curriculum extension and enrichment through outdoor experiences. It is not a separate discipline with prescribed objectives, like science and mathematics. It is simply a learning climate offering opportunities for direct laboratory experiences in identifying and resolving real-life problems, for acquiring skills with which to enjoy a lifetime of creative living, for building concepts and developing concern about man and his natural environment and for getting us back in touch with those aspects of living where our roots were once firm and deep."

—Smith, Carleson, Masters and Davidson, *Outdoor Education*

## First Person

### *Spanning Cultures and Miles:*

# A Teacher's First Person Account of the Zia Pueblo and Peacham, Vermont Student Exchange

by Cathy Browne, Teacher at Peacham Elementary School in Peacham, Vermont

Several thousand miles and the visible differences of culture and geography separate the two small communities of Zia Pueblo, New Mexico and Peacham, Vermont. Elementary and middle school students from both villages recently encountered firsthand their contrasting ways of life, while simultaneously learning about the important values and experiences that they both share.

Four students and two teachers from the Peacham Elementary School visited the Zia Pueblo School in March of 2000 through a grant from the Vermont Rural Partnership, a group of 18 small Vermont schools funded primarily through

the Rural School and Community Trust. Hosted by families living on the pueblo, they were treated to warm welcoming ceremonies at the school, tours of the pueblo by members of the tribal council, and field trips to the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in neighboring Albuquerque.

Much was learned about the culture by the more formal introductions to the village, but both children and adults were most deeply affected by the warmth of the host families and their openness while sharing their culture. The students immediately felt at home, as one student remarked: "I felt like they already knew me—I had friends right away!" and another stated, "I felt really comfortable, like I was staying over at a friend's house." They particularly enjoyed the commonalities found on the basketball court, the ice-breaker for the students at recess within an hour of arrival.

Scenes such as this immediately reinforced the reflections voiced by all the students at the end of their visit that, "they're just like us,



Two students from Vermont and Zia Pueblo create casts of their handshake.

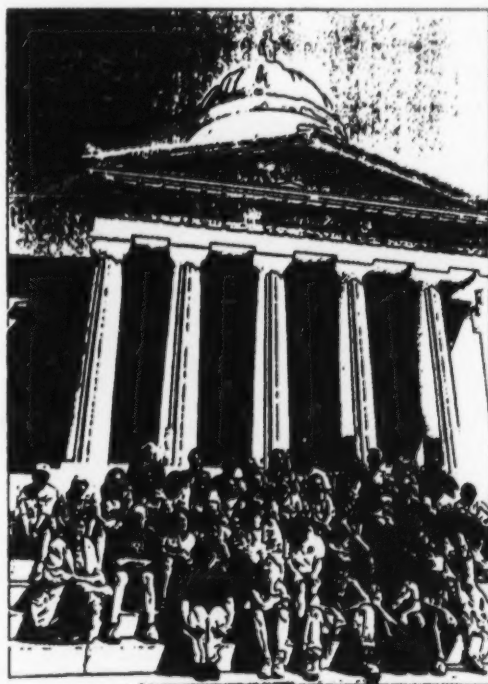
PHOTO BY ROB AMBERG

they do the same things and play the same games." But the students also were deeply aware of the importance of culture and tradition in the Zia community. They noted that the ways they celebrate holidays and their traditional dances were quite different than in Vermont.

One student noted: "We should have our own artwork or pottery like they do, for example with a hermit thrush (the Vermont state bird)." For the two adults, including myself, it became very important to consider how we would share the Peacham culture with the Zia children when they came to visit Peacham the following year. We asked ourselves, "How can we define the Vermont culture? What makes it unique?"

In May of 2001 we were given the opportunity to reciprocate the Zia families' generosity. The Zia School's sixth grade teacher, Tina Aragon, organized a memorable trip for her sixth grade class of nine students, funded through the Rural Trust, and Futures for Children, a nonprofit group that supports Native American children.

The Peacham students were quite excited to be seeing their friends again. As one of the students who visited New Mexico said, "I was glad that my old friends could come over and I could see them again, because I was afraid I wouldn't. I was really happy that they could make it." The Peacham students and their parents were eager to share their lives and surroundings with the Zia students, and together they presented a



Zia and Peacham students on the steps of the state house in Montpelier, VT.

PHOTO BY ROB AMBERG

rich, local heritage to their visitors. Together, they made maple candy, visited local ponds and forests, and looked for deer tracks. They visited a local dairy farm, and took field trips to meet the Governor of Vermont and to taste Ben and Jerry's ice cream.

The visit also helped to tangibly share the powerful connections made in the original visit by a small segment of the school population with a wider section of the Peacham community. One student who hosted two of the boys stated:

*I learned a lot about their culture. I learned how they respected things differently than we do. Like they consider rocks as weapons, and we just consider them as rocks. They don't use them and they don't throw them at anybody, unless they're going to kill an animal... We saw a lot of turkeys and they chased the turkeys around the field. They missed the turkey hunting season in New Mexico. They make their houses out of mud, out of adobe, probably because they have a good supply of it out there. They like the thick forests and the green grass we have.*

Another girl mentioned the similarities and differences that the Peacham students had first noted on their visit to Zia. She reflected upon the traditions in which she does participate, and the connections she made with her visitors during their short visit.

*When they first got here we were kind of nervous, and we didn't really talk. But after we ate dinner we started playing basketball and we got to know them better. It was fun to have them. I thought they were going to be in moccasins and stuff, and they dressed like me. Their stores are the same distance away as ours. They really liked going upstairs, because they don't have an upstairs.*

*They have the buffalo dance, and it has one girl, and that was Heather and she showed me the dance. We don't really have festivals like they do. But we make maple syrup, we get a lot more snow than they do, we ski and skate...and I played in the Memorial Day celebration with the school band—that's a town celebration and tradition, and we have the 4th of July. I was really sad [when they left]. I wanted them to stay. I've written to them three times. I wrote them the day they left when I got home from school. Heather just wrote me back. I told them we should go out in August for the feast.*

This exchange has given students from two small, isolated communities a taste of a larger world in which people can be both outwardly different but also inherently the same. They will know that where they come from is important to who they are, and that they can find connections to others wherever they may find themselves in the future.



Zia students with their host family making maple sugar candy.

## New Grants Build on Annenberg Funding

from page 3

that help local teachers develop curricula in which students will develop business plans and actually start their own businesses. Each class will have a community support team, made up of five to eight people in the community that will serve as an advisory group.

The program leaders are standing behind the student businesses, by placing a portion of the grant aside to be used as a loan-loss reserve fund. "Essentially, we are saying to a local bank, 'if you provide the necessary funds to these local businesses, we will pay you any losses.' This offers us the ability to leverage money from the local financial institutions and allows them to participate in the Community Reinvestment Act. It will help the kids. And, it will help the community with a new source of economic generation," said Hoffman.

## School Reform in Pennsylvania

A more recent addition to the Rural Trust network, the Pennsylvania School Reform Network (PSRN) received a three-year grant of \$487,245 from Philadelphia's William Penn Foundation in February. The grant will help PSRN continue its mission of creating a new state-wide system for funding public schools, and creating greater local accountability for results.

It will also help promote student, policymaker and public engagement in public education issues and reform, particularly in under-funded communities. With more people living in rural communities in Pennsylvania than in any other state, there are many people to educate about the unfairness of Pennsylvania's school funding system, and many people with whom to work toward solutions.

"The [original] grant from the Rural Trust allowed us to engage in statewide policy issues more deeply and broadly than was possible before. And, it was exactly that expansion of our efforts that attracted the William Penn Foundation and made that grant possible," said PSRN Director Timothy Potts.





THE RURAL SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY TRUST

# Rural Roots

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## Publications of Note

### *The Organization of Hope: A Workbook for Rural Asset-based Community Development*

from the Asset-based Community Development Foundation and the Blandin Foundation

This workbook explains rural asset-based community development, provides current examples of that work (one of which is associated with the Yuba Watershed Alliance, a Rural Trust network site) and provides resources and how-to's to apply to your community. Available through ACTA Publications at (800) 397-2282. The book is \$9.

### *Education and Community Building: Connecting Two Worlds*

by Jeanne Jehl, Martin J. Blank  
and Barbara McCloud

This report offers guidance on how to increase and strengthen the joint ef-

forts of educators and community members and identifies the "sticking points" that can make working together difficult for the two groups. To order, contact the Institute for Educational Leadership at (202) 822-8405, e-mail iel@iel.org. The booklet is \$9.

### *Thriving Together: Connecting Rural School Improvement and Community Development*

from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

This practical guide for schools or community organizations provides tips for building effective teams, starting service-learning or entrepreneurial education projects and transforming a school into a community center. It also includes project planning worksheets and checklists, fact sheets and additional resources. Ordering information can be found at [www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/fam22.html](http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/fam22.html), or call (512) 476-

6861. The book is \$39.94 in print; \$29.95 as a CD-ROM.

### *Improving Rural School Facilities: Design, Construction, Finance and Support*

edited by Sarah Dewees and Patricia Cahape Hammer

While the condition of rural school facilities varies across the country, most rural school districts face similar issues as they consider new facility construction, renovations or additions. These include: how to gain public support for funding; how to make the best use of local resources; how to design buildings that are useful to the community in a variety of capacities; and how to design renovations or new buildings that optimize instruction and efficiently incorporate technology. This book provides overviews of these issues and offers inspiring case studies of communities that have worked against the odds and succeeded. To order, call AEL at (800) 624-9120 or email [aelinfo@ael.org](mailto:aelinfo@ael.org). The book is \$18.

Volume 2, No. 5  
October 2001



ISSN 1532-642X

# Rural Roots

*News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust*

## Wisconsin's Youth Press: Hands-On Media Work

*By Alison Yaunches*

**W**hen Mary Caton-Rosser teaches her "hamburger model" of writing to the students of Wisconsin's Youth Press,

composing a news story is no longer intimidating; instead, students find the process straightforward ... and even fun. By constructing a burger—looking at the meat as the story line, the top bun as the introduction, the bottom bun as the conclusion, and the condiments as story enhancements and explanations—students approach their writing project using methodical, logical techniques.

"They're looking at a hamburger in a much different way ... all of a sudden, writing a story makes sense," explains Rosser, the director of Youth Press. "We stress writing as the basis for all of our media work, and so we try to make it as fun and interactive as possible."

The burger model is just one way that Rosser and her team of mentors at Youth Press train middle and high school (and some elementary and college) students in real-life media/communications skills and techniques.

Youth Press does not stop at training and educating—they insist on doing. The program provides participants with direct, hands-on experiences in the recording studio of a radio station, on the set of a public access television station, and behind the keyboard writing stories for Youth Press and community publications.

As an organization, Youth Press is ensuring that the youth of Wisconsin, particularly in its rural areas, have influence in the community, an opportunity



*Students producing a public access television show*

to effect change, and a chance to have their voices heard.

### To Make a Difference

Chuck Ericksen, coordinator of the Rural Trust network site New Paradigm Partners (NPP), along with Rosser and others initiated Youth Press almost five years ago. "The idea was to give young people an opportunity to describe, interpret, and express their own reality and have a variety of public audiences so that their voice [would be] heard. The second idea was to emphasize the importance of media and journalism as a way to make our communities and schools a better place. This isn't just writing in a vacuum—it's writing to make a difference," says Eriksen.

*continued on page 8*

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## Datebook

### October 26-31, 2001

#### Rural Trust Native Sites Working Group/National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Conference

Boothill Inn, Billings, Montana/  
Holiday Inn Grand Montana,  
Billings, Montana

The Rural Trust Native Sites Working Group will meet on October 26-27, 2001 immediately prior to the annual National Indian Education Conference that will be held from October 27-31. The Native Sites Working Group meeting will focus on finalizing a three-year work plan and discussing fundraising strategies.

Representatives from Rural Trust network sites, including Alaska Rural Challenge, Navajo Nation, Santa Fe Indian School, and the Rural Education Advancement Program (Lumbee Tribe), will participate in the meeting. These groups also will be hosting a conference strand at the NIEA conference in which they will share their work with other Indian educators from across the country. Contact Rural Trust Steward, Elaine Salinas, for more information at (920) 497-3602 or [elaine.salinas@ruraledu.org](mailto:elaine.salinas@ruraledu.org).

### November 1-4, 2001

#### The Odyssey of Learning: The 29th Annual Association for Experiential Education (AEE) International Conference

Charleston Civic Center,  
Charleston, West Virginia

Workshops will cover: school curriculum, facilitation issues, outdoor education research and evaluation opportunities. Other topics include: adventure-based programming and outdoor education program administration.

For more information or to register online, go to [www.aee.org/conferences/2001intdconf.htm](http://www.aee.org/conferences/2001intdconf.htm). Or contact Cheryl Schwartz at (304) 440-9581; e-mail [cheryl@aee.org](mailto:cheryl@aee.org).

### November 4-5, 2001

#### 23rd Annual Rural and Small School Conference

Presented by the Center for Rural Education & Small Schools, and the College of Education at Kansas State University

Kansas State University,  
Manhattan, Kansas

Presentations will highlight current research or exemplary programs involving rural education. Emphasis on leadership, technology, school-to-work, standards-based education, and practices that enhance classroom learning, increased achievement, address cultural and language diversity and promote connectivity with the community. For more information, go to <http://www2.educ.ksu.edu/organizations/cress/> or contact Barbara Havlicek at (785) 532-5886, e-mail [barbhav@ksu.edu](mailto:barbhav@ksu.edu).

### November 6-7, 2001

#### Wisconsin Rural Challenge (WRC)/Youth Connecting Communities Fall Gathering

Wisconsin Lions Camp  
near Rosholt, Wisconsin

At this meeting, WRC will unveil "Youth Connecting Communities," a joint initiative with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to engage students and the technological resources of schools in addressing the "digital divide" within Wisconsin's rural communities. The program will also include workshops on place-based learning, social and economic entrepreneurship, youth involvement in rural policy advocacy, and the development of a youth leadership plan for the Wisconsin Rural Challenge. Contact Chuck Erickson of the WRC for more information at: (715) 986-2020 or [chuck@CESA11.k12.wi.us](mailto:chuck@CESA11.k12.wi.us).

### November 12-13, 2001

#### Brokering School and Community Resources for One Vision

Rural Trust Northeast (Maine, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont) Regional Meeting

New England Conference Center,  
Durham, New Hampshire

Contact Rural Trust Northeast Steward Julie Bartsch at (978) 779-0047, or by e-mail at [julie.bartsch@ruraledu.org](mailto:julie.bartsch@ruraledu.org).



## Rural Roots

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Rural Roots is published six times a year by the Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling.

Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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## Classroom Resource Offers Lesson Plans on Community Heritage

Middle- and high-school teachers across the country have a new place-based education resource in a poster just published by the Rural School and Community Trust and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

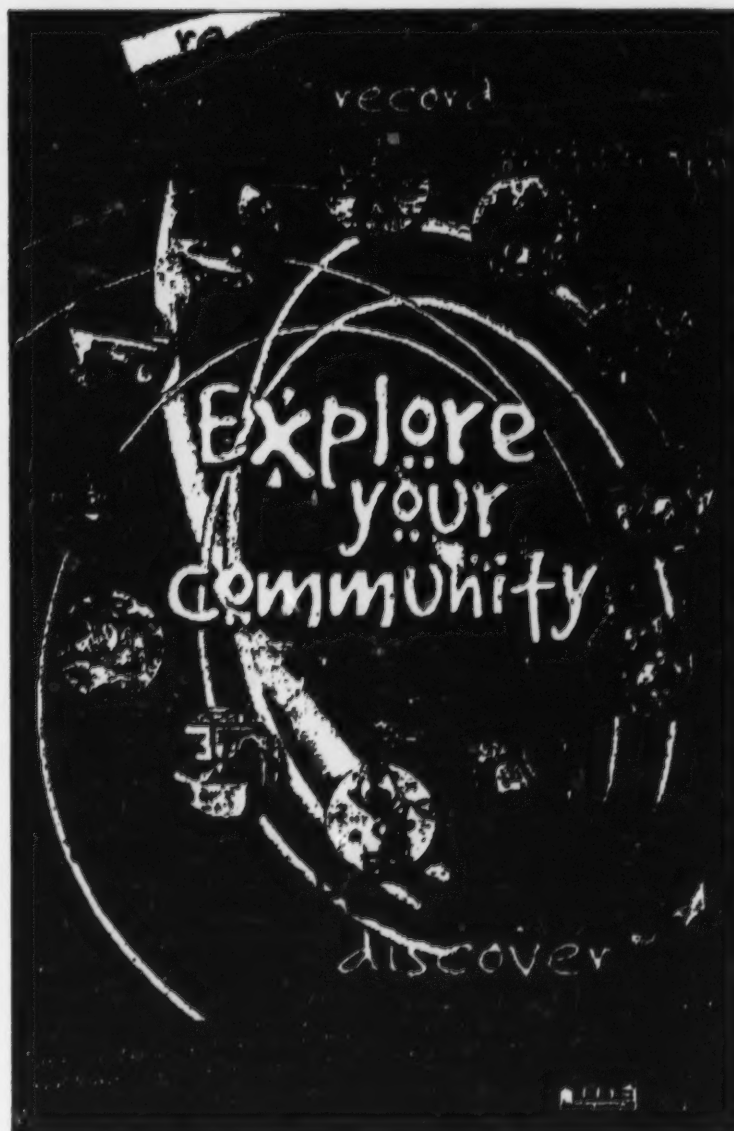
Called "Explore Your Community," the colorful 23 x 34-inch poster features examples of community heritage—music, dance, cultural festivals, traditional occupations, games, and more—on the front. The back of the poster contains information and lesson plans for teachers who want to use the community as a classroom by involving their students in studying community heritage. This information is contained on six panels that can easily be photocopied by teachers for classroom use. In addition to documenting how community heritage studies can enhance students' academic learning and technical skills development, the panels address how to:

- Identify examples of community culture;
- Identify the "community culture" of your own school;
- Document examples of family lore, community celebrations, and occupational traditions; and
- Create community maps, tours, cookbooks, performances and other community heritage projects.

The poster also points teachers to numerous online and published resources in folklore, folklife, oral history, and

place-based education, including the websites of the Rural Trust ([www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org)) and the American Folklife Center ([www.loc.gov/folklife/](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/)).

Single copies of the poster are available free to teachers. Send your name, grade-level, school name, and address to: Explore Your Community, Rural School and Community Trust, 1825 K St. NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006, or e-mail this information to [poster@ruraledu.org](mailto:poster@ruraledu.org).



Three Rural Trust network sites with extensive oral history websites will be featured as resources for educators and students on the "Explore Your Community" link accessed through the American Folklife Center's website ([www.loc.gov/folklife/](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/)). Mariposa Middle School (with the Mariposa County Unified School District in California), the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development in Texas, and the Rocky Gap High School (with the Appalachian Rural Education Network in Virginia) are the three featured projects.

## Echoes in the Hallway: Students' Views of Testing Gone Awry

By John Eckman

As a teacher, Joe Hiney was much loved by his students because he listened, he cared, he pushed, and he was willing to be their friend. The teachers portrayed in Hiney's play, *Echoes in the Hallway*, are just the opposite. As a result of the kind of emphasis on standardization and rote work that Hiney saw influencing Virginia's public school system, his stage teachers have become droning automata, dispensing and testing factoids devoid of context. They ignore their students' needs and forge ahead through a canned curriculum. *Echoes in the Hallway*, now available as a video produced by the Rural Trust, offers a provocative view of what education could become if we ignore the human element of students' lives and the challenges they face.

I first saw a production of *Echoes* in February 2000, when it was used to begin a meeting of over 300 teachers and parents in the Shenandoah Valley who were concerned about the direction of high stakes testing in Virginia. The short play produced by Hiney's students from Turner Ashby High School brought tears and laughter to the audience, making all of us reassess how much time we can give to real human interaction with young people. After talking with other education advocates about how the show could be useful to other audiences, Hiney and I were discussing plans for making a video. Sadly, Joe Hiney died in a bicycling accident in May 2000 at the age of 32. This video and his many students carry on his work.

Starring the original student cast, the 30-minute video provides a powerful conversation starter for meetings with anyone concerned about education issues—faculty, administration, parents, community activists, and students. The play, which includes several original songs by Hiney, touches on tough issues including school violence, discrimina-

tion, teen pregnancy, and domestic abuse. Audiences are left to sort through the meaning of these quick glimpses into students' lives and to ponder how their schools' policies and practices support their students as individuals.

The Rural Trust's primary goal in making the video is to stimulate dialogue on education issues. The show presents a very one-sided view of standards that does not recognize that some teachers may be able to take advantage of a uniform system of instruction. Showing the video to a school faculty could offer a chance to discuss how to work within such constraints and to turn them into

opportunities. The same showing could also spark people to talk about state assessments and to consider what actions may be needed to change them.

Our second goal is to encourage further productions of the play. Live productions bring immediacy and relevancy that video cannot muster. As many art, music and theater programs around the country are threatened by a narrowing of the curriculum, *Echoes* provides a chance to address the situation directly, opening the door to influence students, teachers and policymakers. Some audiences may

continued on page 11



## REFC Director Joins Rural Trust

The Rural School and Community Trust has named Gregory C. Malhoit as the director of the newly created Rural Education Finance Center (REFC), established in August to provide services to rural groups across the nation who are working to improve funding for rural schools and the children they serve. Malhoit

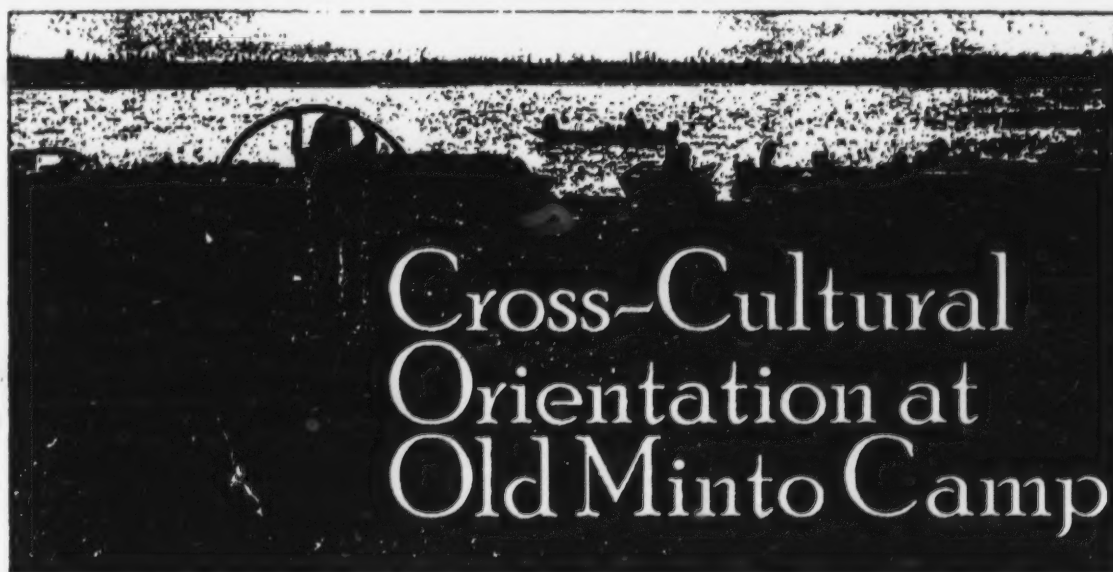
joins the Rural Trust after serving as the Executive Director of the North Carolina Justice and Community Development Center, a statewide organization focused on economic and legal issues that impact poor and rural communities.

"We are delighted that this project will get off the ground under the direction of someone with the impressive legal and advocacy credentials of Greg Malhoit," said Rachel Tompkins, Rural Trust President. "His experience as an advocate for social and economic justice in the fields of public education and civil rights law makes him an ideal leader in our efforts to assure educational equity and adequacy for rural schoolchildren."

During his tenure with the Justice Center, Malhoit led its education reform program, which focused on equity and adequacy in the state school finance system, the racial achievement gap, the needs of Limited-English Proficient students, and high stakes testing. From 1974 until 1990, he served as Executive Director of East Central Community Legal Services, a legal aid program serving a five-county region of North Carolina.

Malhoit is a 1973 graduate of the University of Nebraska School of Law who has litigated cases at all levels of the state and has served on the faculty of N.C. Central University School of Law. He has also lectured on a broad array of education topics both in North Carolina and nationally.

Greg Malhoit can be e-mailed at [greg.malhoit@ruraledu.org](mailto:greg.malhoit@ruraledu.org).



# Cross-Cultural Orientation at Old Minto Camp

*Introduction by Ray Barnhardt*



PHOTOS BY ROB AMBERG

*Ray Barnhardt is a Rural Trust board member, a Co-Director of Alaska Rural Challenge, and also a Professor of Cross Cultural Education and Rural Development at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.*

**F**or the past 14 summers, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, in conjunction with the Cultural Heritage and Education Institute of the village of Minto, have been offering an opportunity for educators in selected summer courses to spend a week at the Old Minto Cultural Camp on the Tanana River under the tutelage of the local Athabascan Elders. The program is designed for teachers and others new to Alaska who enroll in the UAF Cross-Cultural Orientation Program.

Teachers are able to immerse themselves in a new cultural environment in a non-threatening and guided fashion that allows them to set aside their own predispositions long enough to begin to see the world through other people's eyes. For this, most of the credit needs to go to the Elders of Minto, who have mastered the art of making themselves accessible to others, and to Robert Charlie, the Camp Director who makes it all happen.

Except for a few basic safety rules that are made explicit upon arrival, everything at the camp is learned through participation in the ongoing life of the people serving as our hosts/teachers. Volunteer work crews are assembled for the various projects and activities that are always underway, with the Elders providing guidance and teaching by example. Many small clusters of people—young and old, Native and non-Native, experts and novices—can be seen throughout the camp busily working, visiting, showing, doing, listening and learning. Teachers become students and students become teachers.

At the end of the day, people gather to sing, dance, joke, tell stories and play games. On the last evening, a potlatch is held with special foods prepared by the camp participants and served in a traditional format, followed by speeches relating the events of the week to the life and history of the area and the people of Minto. By the time the boats head back upriver at the end of the week, everyone has become a part of Old Minto and the people whose ancestors are buried there. It is an experience for which there is no textbook equivalent. Rural Trust photographer Rob Amberg and his family participated in the 2001 Old Minto Camp. The photo essay he has assembled captures some of the people and events that make Old Minto a unique and treasured place.





# Old Minto

*Photos and text by Rob Amberg*

**O**ld Minto is not down on many maps. It's the site of an abandoned Athabascan (Native Alaskan) village on the banks of the Tanana River in interior Alaska. For the last 14 years, the Athabascan Elders of the "new" village of Minto, in conjunction with the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), have been using the former village as a setting for a Cultural Orientation Camp for rural teachers. I've arrived at Old Minto after a 75-minute cold, fast ride in a flat-bottomed skiff, with a group of faculty and students from UAF for a week of cross-cultural interaction.

The Tanana River is powerful and big. Elder Neal Charlie tells me that the river has shifted over the years and what is now the middle was once the site of the village church. It's glacier fed, cold, and silt-laden. While the river is surely dangerous and commands respect, it has for centuries been the lifeblood of villages like Old Minto, providing food, clothing, shelter, transportation links, and spiritual sustenance.

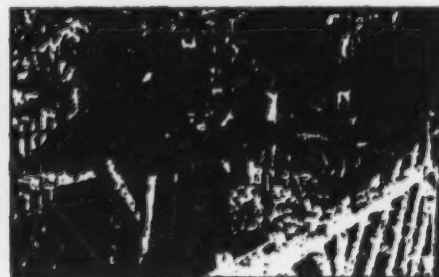
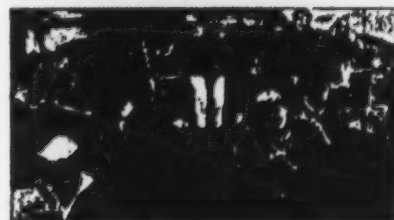
We are met by the Elders and staff people and go over camp rules. New cabins are being built for the Elders by a group of Americorps volunteers and our participation is encouraged. We set up our tents and eat supper. As the sun skirts the horizon along the river, we listen to the Elders sing traditional Athabascan songs until Virgil Titus,

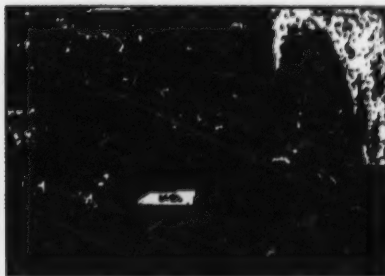
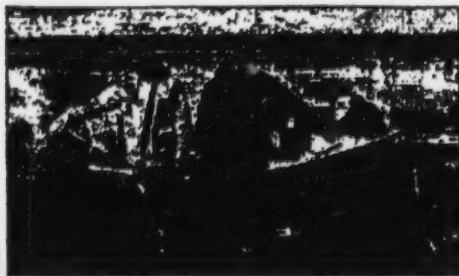
a middle-aged man, breaks out a guitar and we all sing along to renditions of country and blues songs.

I wake to the loud calls of the trumpeter swans that live in the swamp beside the camp. It goes on for minutes, followed by a great flapping of wings and then silence.

A group of us join Bill Pfisterer in his boat and head five miles downriver to Lige and Susie Charlie's fish camp. With silent hand gestures, a young Athabascan man guides Bill through a maze of submerged logs, sandbars, and other obstacles. The camp has a well with hand pump set close to the river that is the closest place to get drinking water. There's a cabin, some drying poles for fish, and a storage shed. There is a tall straight spruce tree on the bank of the river with its limbs sheared that Lige uses to spot moose. We pump 150 gallons of water, which will sustain the camp for a day.

Spent a long afternoon with Sarah Titus in the vestibule of her tent. She has a fire going, and a mosquito coil lit, and it's comfortable sitting and visiting. She strips the bark from spruce roots which will be used to tie the pieces of a birch bark basket while we talk about the many changes that have come to the village during her lifetime. The Elders grew up in and continue to practice a hunter/gatherer lifestyle. People moved from hunting camp, to fishing camp, to gather-up camp, to winter camp, and depended on following the movement of game





for their needs. Travel was by boat, or on foot, or dogled. Now, there is road access from New Minto to Fairbanks, permanent housing, and a greater dependence on the mainstream economy. The Elders speak of their young people not eating the right foods, watching too much TV, and losing contact with their language and traditions.

Riding back from collecting spruce roots with Neal and Geraldine Charlie, Neal guided the boat up a narrow, shallow channel. We paddled and poled our way in. Neal explained it was at this seemingly insignificant spot over 100 years ago that the Athabascan Elders decided to place the original village at Old Minto.

In the evenings, we often sit around the campfire, or by the river, with the Elders. The younger children play basketball, or with Pokemon cards. Some people carve on diamond willow branches they're fashioning into walking sticks. The midnight sun keeps your body working overtime and we often work late on the cabins, hauling and filtering water, gathering firewood.

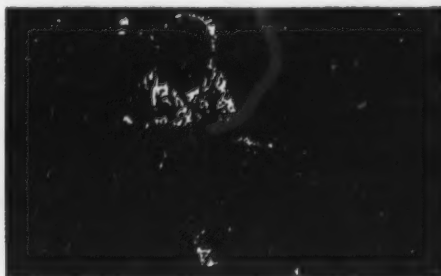
The village has a permit to kill a moose for a ceremonial potlatch and two of the younger men have found a moose willing to offer itself. The carcass is brought in large pieces and the whole village participates in the butchering. The meat is hung in the smokehouse where a smoky fire will cure it and keep it insect free. Some of the meat is cooked that night and eaten as hot chunks right from the grill.

Donations of food for the potlatch have come from other villages, and ducks, beaver and salmon all make their way to the butchering table. The butchering is done by the younger men with the Elders instructing

on technique. One of the salmon contains an enormous egg sac full of bright red roe. Three Japanese students from UAF separate the eggs from the membrane telling us they are a national delicacy in Japan. Virgil says the Athabascan would freeze small balls of the concentrated protein and carry them as energy sources on hunting and trapping trips in the Arctic winter.

I walk today with Sarah, her husband Berkman, and some of their grandchildren to the site of the village cemetery. It's a mile through the mosquito-infested forest and swamp. Berkman says the mosquitoes are a sure sign there is a moose close by and carries a loaded rifle on the walk. The graves are spread out along a high strip of ground through the forest. Sarah knows most of the many generations of deceased and tells the young people stories about them.

Potlatch day and the once tranquil camp is one of hyperactivity. Food is being prepared in the kitchen and on a number of campfires. Blue tarps are laid out on the ground and duct-taped together as a ceremonial family table. People arrive throughout the day, all in boats, some from villages far to the North. The students are instructed on proper serving etiquette and the food is moved to the center of the potlatch dining area. The Elders are served first. After we eat, camp director Robert Charlie and the Elders speak about the symbolic importance of the potlatch and the village itself. How Old Minto is memory, a reuniting of people, both young and old, with their history. But this year, with new energy and vision, and new facilities, everyone also understands the village is moving forward as a living body on a new path.





Top: Students working at WRLS Radio in Hayward, WI.

Right: Students with an adult advisor at WOJB 88.9 FM in Wisconsin, producing Youth Press' Rebel Radio show.



### Wisconsin's Youth Press: Hands-on Media Work

from page 1

Since its beginning as an NPP program, Youth Press has gone through various incarnations and funding partnerships while achieving tremendous growth, originating as a regionalized project and burgeoning into a statewide network. Today, the program is primarily funded and run through the Center for Community Outreach at the Marshfield Medical Research and Education Foundation in Wisconsin.

Although once concentrated in northwest Wisconsin, Youth Press now works with students and communities across the state providing training, technical assistance and guidance. With Youth Press serving in a "resource" capacity, it is the local communities that must fund and support their students' programs. Through Wisconsin Rural Challenge, another Rural Trust network site, NPP continues to be involved with the organization by helping to coordinate "contracts," or outside paid work that Youth Press students carry out for other organizations.

In addition to the contract work, the students who work with Youth Press and the Center for Community Outreach at the Marshfield Clinic publish a quarterly, statewide newsletter entitled *Youth Press of Wisconsin News* (circ. 20,000). The newsletter focuses on healthy teen lifestyles and other issues

important to youth. The students also manage the organization's website ([www.youthpress.com](http://www.youthpress.com)) and run original radio shows, the most notable of which is *Rebel Radio*. They produce an electronic magazine, *M.ZINE*, and are involved in countless other community media programs and internships.

### Community Connections

Students do all of the actual work to produce these materials and complete assigned jobs, with adult mentors urging them on and teaching when appropriate. "Adults serve in more of an advisory position than anything else. They are supervisors, they are encouragers ... they back you up. But, mainly, they want you to do the work. That's the whole thing, getting youth involved. They'll teach you how to do it, then leave you on your own," said student Becky Schaff, a junior at Chetek High School.

As Youth Press students work with adults in the community who are media professionals, learning becomes intergenerational and collaborative across, and within, communities. Adults help with training and also help pave the way for students to get their voices heard. Their role can involve training a student in computer-based film editing or helping to coordinate an interview with a local politician. They have found that, at times, something that seems as simple as setting up an interview can be surprisingly difficult.

"There are times that we have the issue of adults kind of blowing kids off

for interviews. I guess they think, 'What good could a kid really do?' That's where the adult advisor has to build bridges and explain what we're about," said Rosser.

However, this response from just a few interviewees is hardly the norm. Other reactions from the community are often more positive. As a training member of Youth Press, Carol Moon enjoys watching students see their work published and finding that their voices truly do matter. "People are interested in what they have to say," she said.

### Student Voice

Ericksen and Rosser believe student-led community journalism has impacted the thinking of Wisconsin's citizens. When students cover grassroots projects and help disseminate the news they deem important, be it bad or good, from rural communities across the state, community members are forced to take notice. "I think people are coming to realize kids are capable of much more than most generally assume ... They are also seen as more insightful and serious about community issues than most people had assumed," Ericksen said.

With the community-at-large as their audience, students must present their issues in a polished, newsworthy fashion. "Observing and writing about issues important to them, [students] learn how to learn. They are accountable. They are obliged to reflect and evaluate what matters and set priorities that help define their world. Learning journalism skills



and understanding the impact of media are extremely valuable approaches to becoming a productive, articulate and responsible citizen," notes adult training member Richard Brooks.

An example of student autonomy is Youth Press' *Rebel Radio* show on WOJB 88.9 FM on the Lac Courte Oreilles reservation. There, youth have two hours on the first Saturday of each month to cover the tough issues teens deal with on a daily basis. With the guidance of adult supervisors (and parental permission), students share their thoughts with their communities on such topics as gun safety, teen pregnancy, abortion, school violence, and tolerance and diversity. Students meet before each show to decide the agenda and assign research. The result is a riveting radio show that, because it is live, receives automatic community feedback—both positive and negative—from callers.

"On *Rebel Radio*," Rosser explains, "some adults call in and challenge the need for students to actually tackle tough topics. In reality, youth need to talk about these issues and ideas. They need to understand and grapple with their peers on issues of concern, because this is the world they face—these 'tough' topics are all a part of their culture."

When the show elicits criticism from the community, Rosser sees a silver lining: professional learning experiences for her students. "There is always going to be controversy in media; there are always people with opposing opinions. Being assertively respectful is something that all teens involved in Youth Press learn."

Through programs like *Rebel Radio*, students are realizing that their voices matter. One student wrote to Rosser: "I like it when people respond to hearing me, and tell me what they think of what I say." Another writes: "I have become more confident in expressing my opinion." Still another writes: "Through the work of the media, you can change people and influence the community and even the world."

### Learning by Doing Genuine Work

The work done through Youth Press is, for the most part, an extracurricular activity. Students often are paid for their work and their assignments are not just for a grade, but are broadcast or viewable

by the public at large—not a token assignment by any measure.

"If it's good quality work, we get paid for it. One of the standards they usually try to hold to is having middle and high schoolers write at a level that might be expected from college students. They expect that if you are going to get paid, you should show something that you put a lot of work into," said student Becky Schaff.

Erickson is working on another way of keeping the work genuine, and within the context of community change. He hopes his search for contract work for Youth Press students will also help the Youth Press organization gain some sustainability. "Our kids can provide services in and beyond our local communities," said Erickson. "We want foundations and organizations to look to our kids when they're thinking about putting together marketing or public relations strategies, designing a website or creating a video."

One current example of the contract work for students involves Youth Press' work with Wisconsin Rural Challenge's policy program. Students are helping the initiative gain visibility within the community by engaging citizens around the formulation and advocacy of public policies that value and support rural schools and community life.

### Developing a Media Curriculum

"Learning how to communicate well, with resolve, compassion and good judgment—this is what we teach," explains Rosser. However, students involved with Youth Press do not just learn how to write well. They also learn life skills, media skills, social skills, and management skills. Rosser likens the work done through Youth Press as a "project based in general studies."

When NPP began Youth Press, the idea was for the subject to be fully integrated into the curriculum. While there has been some success at that, full integration does not occur often enough, according to Erickson. "We see this as a natural opportunity for our schools and teachers and we need teachers to embrace it," he said.

"There isn't anything you don't come across or get involved in. [Students] really learn about the people and the world

around them through this work," said Rosser. With this belief, she is now working to make information on teaching media studies more accessible to all teachers. While working on her Masters of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Rosser has developed a full-blown media curriculum for teachers to use in almost any class, across subject areas. She intends to promote it and spread the word that teaching and learning about media work can meet state-imposed standards ... and can actually be fun.

### Hamburger—Redux

Which brings us back to the hamburger model. The program has become so successful within the organization that students are clamoring to become "certified" teachers of the model. Students are judged by a series of criteria, including a peer review and a presentation to a panel of adults before becoming fully certified.

"It's fun work, but it's also got some accountability to it. If they think it's going to be real, and if they feel like it's a job that they are working on to make a difference, it becomes a goal for them. And, they don't really mind that at all. It's a challenge," said Rosser.

In the world of Youth Press, it is the challenge that makes the work worth doing.

Mary Rosser can be contacted at [rouston@discover-net.net](mailto:rouston@discover-net.net). Chuck Erickson can be e-mailed at [chuck@cesal1.k12.wi.us](mailto:chuck@cesal1.k12.wi.us). The Youth Press website is [www.youthpress.com](http://www.youthpress.com); in September, a new, interactive website began: [www.youthpressmedia.com](http://www.youthpressmedia.com).

## Feedback

Do you have any questions, comments or feedback? Something got you jazzed up? Think we should cover your story? Have an idea for us? Have a rural education need that we are not fulfilling? We greatly value your thoughts and opinions. Write to the Editor at the Rural School and Community Trust: 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006. Or e-mail: [editor@ruraledu.org](mailto:editor@ruraledu.org). We look forward to hearing from you.

## Person

### *A First Person Account of Wisconsin's Youth Press*

# Toward Tomorrow's Future

By Jessica Mincoff of Youth Press

I can recall the day I got involved in Youth Press as though it was yesterday. It was a blustery fall day; the air hung heavy with the scent of burning leaves as I was tucked away inside Flambeau High School located in rural Tony, Wisconsin. I was taking a leisurely walk through the halls when a club advisor, Bob Hindal, approached me with a proposition to participate in a media exchange with students from Austin, Texas. Naturally, without thinking twice, I accepted and before I knew it I was on a plane with 14 other students from Wisconsin. During our four-day expedition we learned how Austin students utilize their technology and talent to produce film, radio shows, and newspapers. That is how I got involved in Youth Press, nearly four years ago.

Two months after returning from Austin, I graduated and lost touch with Youth Press. I attended the University of Wisconsin in Menomonie for one year, and then took a year off to soul search. Though I missed the welcoming atmosphere of Menomonie as a town, I knew it was only a place for me to visit, but not to live. I spent a year working, trying to find my "real knack." My "real knack" had always been with me—my passion for writing, informing and media. In high school, I was involved with the student newspaper and loved it. I wrote my own column and thrived, as a writer, from the love/hate relationship I developed with my readers. With that

revelation, I enrolled at Mount Senario College in the small town of Ladysmith, Wisconsin and declared myself an English major. I grew up approximately 10 miles from Ladysmith; making the move home was comfortable and a good decision.

One day during composition class in late October 2000, my English professor Kathy Ducommun, asked if anyone would be interested in copy editing for a youth newspaper. She then mentioned Mary Rosser; that name rang a bell. I met Mary when we went to Austin for the media exchange. Within the week I was meeting with Mary and soon after, I was receiving material to copy edit. After copy editing two editions of *Youth Press of Wisconsin News*, Mary offered me the Editor position for Youth Press's electronic magazine, M.ZINE. I gladly accepted the new challenge and freedom to develop a creative outlet for youth. Mary has become my mentor. My first edition of M.ZINE hit cyberspace September 1, 2001 at [www.youthpressmedia.com](http://www.youthpressmedia.com).

The Youth Press network is housed by Marshfield Clinic's statewide Project Forward program at their Center for Community Outreach, based in rural Marshfield, Wisconsin. The Center is the publisher of the *Youth Press of Wisconsin News*, for which I copy edit. While editing with Youth Press, I was offered the Project Forward Coordinator position for Youth Press from the Center. As Project Forward Coordinator I continue my editing, copy editing and Youth Press Advisory Council duties, but also work on statewide initiatives promoting prevention to youth. I work closely with

youth and have a youth assistant, Melanie Rosser, who manages the Youth Press website and is actively involved in the youth editorial board for the newspaper as well as writing for the newspaper. Being involved with the Center has not only been a great network connection for me, but for Youth Press as well. We are able to connect statewide, nationally and, sometimes, globally.

My involvement in Youth Press has been a transformative experience because it has confirmed my love for writing ... my love for broadening my horizons ... putting myself out there to write how I

feel and think. I've also learned how to appreciate the viewpoints of others and to really listen to what they're saying. I have used the qualities gained to encourage youth to do their best. I have become a firm believer in positive reinforcement as well as constructive criticism. When a student looks to me for advice on a writing project, I know they are looking for compliments, but there is also a larger part of them

that wants me to tell them what can be improved in their work to make it more effective. Being valued by youth is all the compliment I need in this job to stay focused. I am working to promote high self-esteem of youth and to show them that what they're thinking and feeling is important.

Imagine a community where everyone is accepted, virtually equal. Everyone's opinion is heard and really listened to and thought about. That is the image Youth Press presents: equality in the world that portrays inequality. Youth Press encourages realistic thinking while being creative at the same time. Promoting this idea and watching youth thrive on it is probably the best thing about working with Youth Press. I feel honored to be working toward a better society ... toward tomorrow's future with a wonderful group of highly respectable youth. I know I'm making a difference in the lives of youth and families and that is an awesome feeling. Thus, a quote from William James, "Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does."

**I am working to promote high self-esteem of youth and to show them that what they're thinking and feeling is important.**



*Youth Press students contemplate a writing project.*

## Council

# Youth Council's Strategic Planning Focuses on Youth/Adult Partnerships, Communicating Message

By Cara Cookson

*Note from the Youth Council: The Rural School and Community Trust's National Youth Council is proud to present its premiere column in Rural Roots. Through this regular offering we plan to share with you not only the work of the Council, but also grassroots efforts in schools and communities throughout rural America, all from the perspective of students.*

Charged with the task of preparing a strategic plan for the next two years, the National Youth Leaders Forum transformed into the Rural Trust National Youth Council during a three-day retreat in Winter Park, Colorado from July 27-29. The 15-member Council, representing regions from Maine to California, reached consensus on the name change in order to reflect the Council's focus on place-based learning and youth and adult partnership on a national level.

On the first day of the retreat, returning Council members welcomed four new members: Kay Schwader from Howard, South Dakota, Crystal Natcho from Sells, Arizona, Maria Hernandez from Eldorado, Texas, and Desiree Hasten from White Castle, Louisiana. Though the schedule provided ample time to enjoy horseback riding, hiking, and other outdoor activities amidst the calming mountain scenery, the Council jumped right into each day's activities, which required mounds of chart paper for brainstorming and patient discussion during group deliberation. Every hour that passed brought new clarity and enthusiasm for the upcoming year.

The second day began by establishing common understandings of place-based learning and youth and adult partnerships as the core principles of the Council's strategic plan. Another round of brainstorming ensued as small groups considered methods for capacity building and advocacy for each principle.

After careful thought and discussion, the Council chose five focus areas and drafted action steps to complete each task. The strategic plan for this year concentrates on communication, both within the Rural Trust and beyond including presentations by council members; teacher development; creating an assessment tool for expanding understanding of youth/adult partnerships; and a two-part institute on youth and adult partnerships. A conversation on governance structures and responsibilities within the Council led to the formation of five committees, one for each initiative, and an executive committee that will include a representative from each committee.

Despite the intense and often meticulous nature of the planning process, the Council members left Winter Park for the Denver International Airport with a sense of pride in the enormous amount of work accomplished, a renewed feeling of camaraderie and optimistic energy among old members and new, and with a common vision for the next year. Over the next month, the various committees will finalize their action steps, and in October, four Council members will attend the Rural Trust Board of Trustees meeting in Washington, D.C. to present their strategic plan.

## Echoes in the Hallway

from page 4

feel that the original, homogenous, rural Virginia cast production does not represent the diversity of faces or issues in their areas. For them we hope the original show can be simply a starting point from which others can add their own monologues and vignettes, tailoring the production to their concerns, their culture, and their place. The Rural Trust will collect new scenes from local productions and provide a library of alternatives.

We hope that many student actors will be able to enjoy the powerful experience that staging this show can provide. As Annie Miahler, an original cast member recalls:

"Although I was involved in sports and other fine arts groups, nothing can compare to the experience I had performing *Echoes*. Not only did I learn a lot about defeat and victory, but I learned what it is like to touch people's lives. Not just make them feel emotions, but to have them change, and make the education system better, if only for one person. I remember the times Mr. Hiney read aloud some letters from students and teachers concerning our show. One teacher admitted acting like the teachers we portrayed, and [began to] see that students' needs go beyond learning algebra and history, and that their individual lives should always come before a state-mandated standardized test."

Videos are available for \$20 (includes shipping and handling) through the Rural Trust. For more information about *Echoes in the Hallway* including video clips, scripts, and discussion questions, please visit [www.echoesinthehallway.com](http://www.echoesinthehallway.com) or contact John Eckman, at [jeckman@ruraledu.org](mailto:jeckman@ruraledu.org) or by calling (540) 432-6962.

*John Eckman, information officer for the Rural Trust, lives, works, and enjoys local theater in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.*





# Rural Roots

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## of Note

### *Radical Equations: Math Literacy and Civil Rights*

By Robert Moses and  
Charles E. Cobb

This book draws striking parallels between mathematical competency and the civil rights movement, while providing a short history of the Algebra Project, Moses' organization that aims to nurture collaboration between parents, teachers and students in order to teach middle-school kids algebra. Moses and Cobb argue that algebra is a crucial stepping-stone to college level math and thus, lifelong economic opportunity. The authors show how the grass-roots organizing efforts that made the civil rights movement so successful can be applied to bring about change in the classroom—and why the Algebra Project's success rate is so high. The book is \$21.00, and is available through bookstores.

### *Living Traditions—A Teacher's Guide: Teaching Local History Using State and National Learning Standards*

By Mark Shelding, Martin Kemple  
and Joseph Kiefer

This well-organized and easy-to-understand book guides teachers through a step-by-step process for developing standards-based curricula, projects and activities focusing on the living traditions of the community surrounding their school. Through dozens of work sheets, sample activities and checklists, this book helps teachers develop their very own place-based integrated units, drawing on their unique local resources, including libraries and community members. To order, contact Food Works by e-mail at [foodwork@together.net](mailto:foodwork@together.net) or call toll-free (800) 310-1515. The book is \$19.95, \$13.97 for 10 or more copies.

### *All Roads Lead Home*

Edited by Sharon Bishop, Carol  
MacDaniels and Miles Bryant

This book, funded by Nebraska's School at the Center, includes poetry, biographies, essays, fiction and visuals produced by high school students across the state. The collection shares what students in rural Nebraska value about their homes and heritage, what they notice about the people and places where they live, and how they interact with friends, family and community members. The book is \$15.00 and is available from the University of Nebraska. Contact Miles Bryant at (402) 472-0960 or [mbryant1@unl.edu](mailto:mbryant1@unl.edu) for more information.

*If you would like your publication to be considered for Publications of Note, please send the book, along with ordering information to: Editor, Rural Trust, 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006.*

Volume 2, No. 6  
December 2001



ISSN 1532-642X

# Rural Roots

*News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust*

## Standards and Testing

### Where Does Place-Based Learning Fit In?

*By Alison Yaunches*

**S**tandards. Assessment. Accountability. These words can sound daunting even to the most seasoned place-based educator. However, in today's education environment they are a daily reality, and so practitioners must find ways to take the two seemingly opposite

concepts of place-based curriculum and state-imposed standards and link them together.

Three programs in three different states involved with the Rural Trust's portfolio design team process have been able to take their innovative strategies in teaching and curriculum and demonstrate the quantitative power of place-based education. These sites have proven the credibility of place-based education in meeting or even exceeding state standards. One site using place-based education has shown improvement in students' high-stakes test scores. From opposite corners of the map, organizations representing the

states of Louisiana, Vermont and Wyoming are proving that place-based education can easily walk hand-in-hand with state-imposed standards, high-stakes tests and accountability.

#### **East Feliciana Parish Schools, Louisiana**

##### ***A case of using place-based learning to tackle state standards and testing***

In the rolling hills 30 miles north of the Louisiana state capital of Baton Rouge, sits the East Feliciana Parish



*Photo courtesy of East Feliciana Parish Schools.*

(Louisiana's equivalent of a county). Spanish for "happy land," East Feliciana is an area of limited resources and multiple educational challenges. The parish is one of the poorest in the state, and serves approximately 3,000 students, 79 percent of whom are African-American. Forty-two percent of parish residents do not have a high school diploma.

It was in this environment that an initiative dubbed *Project Connect* was launched to address the parish's historically low test scores in science and math. With high-stakes testing in grades 4, 8,

*continued on page 6*

## Rural Datebook

### February 24-27, 2002

#### Strengthening Communities: Enhancing Extension's Role

Orlando Airport Marriott Hotel,  
Orlando, Florida

This first national Cooperative Extension conference will bring together Extension professionals from across the system to share resources and information related to community resources and economic development programming. Seven program area tracks will be covered: economic development, community decision making, education and workforce development, information technology, local government education, land and natural resources use, and community services.

The registration fee is \$175 and does not include room and board. Contact the Southern Rural Development Center at (662) 325-3207 for more information, or go to their website at <http://ext.msstate.edu/srdc>.

### March 7-9, 2002

#### No Child Left Behind: The Vital Role of Rural Schools

John Ascuaga's Nugget Hotel,  
Reno, Nevada

This conference is especially valuable for educators, pre-service educators, administrators, service providers, parents, and policy makers who would like to share information on special education, and address critical issues affecting the delivery of services for individuals with disabilities living in rural areas. More information will be available in the coming months.

Contact Judy Weyrauch at the American Conference on Rural Special Education (ACRES) headquarters at (785) 532-2737 or [acres@ksu.edu](mailto:acres@ksu.edu) for more information.

### March 8, 2002

#### Schools as Caring Communities: Learning and Leading by Engaging the Public

Marriott Riverwalk Hotel,  
San Antonio, TX

This is one of many institutes held a day before ASCD's (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) annual conference. If teachers, parents, and other members of your learning community ever question the role your school plays in creating a caring community, here's an opportunity to think more deeply about this issue and learn how to engage others in constructive discourse about community priorities for public education. This institute will challenge you to take a closer look at: what role your school should play in promoting the larger well-being of residents; how to organize a "town meeting" for the purpose of opening a dialogue between residents and school district stakeholders; why you should focus on creating a sustainable, long-term agenda; and how to initiate a public engagement project in your community. The institute is \$229 (ASCD members)/\$279 (nonmembers).

The ASCD conference, *Choosing to Dance: Taking Bold Steps for the Sake of Our Children*, will be held from March 9-11, 2002. Go to ASCD's website at [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org) or call (800) 933-2723 for more information on the conference and institutes, or to register for both.

### March 15-17, 2002

#### 25th Annual Appalachian Studies Conference

Unicoi State Park, Helen, Georgia

Entitled *Voices from the Margins, Living on the Fringe*, this conference will feature special sessions on Hispanic, African-American and Cherokee communities, as well as women and girls, gays and lesbians, prisoners and others from the outskirts or margins of Appalachia. There will be a pre-conference tour of the John C. Campbell Folk School and the usual panels,

films, readings, dancing and fashion show.

Preliminary program and registration materials will be available by early January on the Appalachian Studies website, [www.appalachianstudies.org](http://www.appalachianstudies.org). Room reservations at Unicoi are available now on their website. Contact Patricia Beaver, (828) 262-4089, [beaverpd@appstate.edu](mailto:beaverpd@appstate.edu) for further information.

To list your upcoming events in the February 2002 newsletter please contact Rural Roots at [editor@ruraledu.org](mailto:editor@ruraledu.org) or call (202) 955-7177, ext. 13.



## Rural Roots

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Rural Roots is published six times a year by the Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling.

Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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## Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds Award Grant for School Leadership

The Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds has awarded a planning grant of \$50,000 to the Rural Trust for a new initiative to improve rural school leadership in the "Black Belt" states of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. With this grant, the Rural Trust will create a working group of rural principals and superintendents to design a plan for professional leadership development in rural areas.

Ultimately, the Rural Trust hopes to strengthen the abilities of rural school superintendents and principals to improve student learning and teacher quality, and create a network of support, mentoring and training for rural school leaders.

"In addition to lacking quality professional development programs, school leaders in the rural Black Belt often face obstacles of isolation, low professional pay and scarce resources," said Rural Trust President Rachel Tompkins. "This grant will help rural principals and superintendents overcome these obstacles by working together at the state and regional level to get the help they need to improve rural schools."

The grant was awarded as part of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds' *Ventures in Leadership* program, whose goal is to help nonprofit organizations and public schools around the country test innovative ideas for improving educational leadership.



## Ramirez Joins Rural Trust

Francisco Ramirez joined the Rural Trust as the Director of Finance and Administration in October 2001, after eight years as the Chief Financial Officer at the International Youth Foundation, where he was in charge of financial, administrative and human resources affairs. Prior to that, he worked in a variety of management positions at the International Planned Parenthood Federation in both New York City and London for 17 years.

A native Chilean, Ramirez has a wealth of experience working with 501(c)(3) organizations and handling multi-million dollar budgets. He is on the Board of Directors of both the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations and the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America. Ramirez is a fluent Spanish speaker, with working knowledge of Portuguese, Italian and French.

## NewsBriefs

### New Volume of Oral History

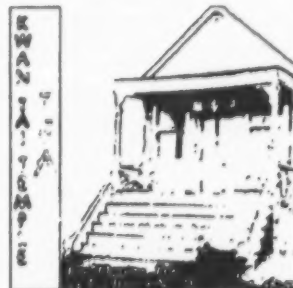
*Voices of the Valley*, Volume III is now available from North Coast Rural Challenge Network's (NCRCN) Anderson Valley site. The book, which includes a CD of recorded oral histories, is a continuation of earlier volumes focusing on student interviews with Anderson Valley Elders. Contact Mitch Mendosa at (707) 895-2199 or [mmendosa@avusd.k12.ca.us](mailto:mmendosa@avusd.k12.ca.us) to order.

### Survey of Rural Americans Finds Participants Rating Quality of Life High

In a national survey conducted by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change entitled *Voices of Rural America*, over three-quarters of rural residents surveyed rate the quality of life in their community as either excellent or good. Running counter to common perceptions of isolation and real physical detachment, rural residents were more likely to feel connected to their communities than urban residents and equally optimistic about their community's prospects for the future. Eighty percent of those surveyed indicated that they feel their community's best years might lie ahead. For more survey results, go to [www.pew-partnership.org](http://www.pew-partnership.org).

### A Box of Tea to Support California Taoist Temple

Inspired by Mendocino High School students, who traced their community's Chinese history and became advocates for the restoration of their local Taoist Kwan Tai Temple, the Thanksgiving Coffee Company created its Kwan Tai Temple Tea. With each purchase of this Oolong tea, a portion of the proceeds will go to the temple in Mendocino, California for preservation and educational programs. To order, contact Loretta McCoard via e-mail at [lmccoard@mcn.org](mailto:lmccoard@mcn.org); to learn more about the temple and preservation efforts, go to [www.kwaintaitemple.org](http://www.kwaintaitemple.org). The box of tea is \$8.00, which includes shipping and handling.



## First Person

### *A First Person Account of the Rural Trust Portfolio Design Process*

# A Light Shining on Learning That Happens Within the Context of Community

By Ginny Jaramillo

In the Spring of 1999, our school was invited by the Rural Trust to participate in the design of a portfolio assessment process that would broaden the scope of school assessment to include both student and community learning and contributions, student voice, and the deepening and spreading of place-based instruction. As network members of the Rural Trust, we were already familiar with the place-based work being done in more than 700 sites throughout the nation, and we were eager to help find a way to develop high-quality assessment tools for such important work. In fact, the experience turned out to be far more valuable than any of us had imagined.

Having spent the last seven years as administrator of Guffey School, a Pre-K-8 charter grade school with an enrollment of 34 in the Pike Wilderness area of Colorado, I am familiar with the frustration of developing decent tools for assessing learning, particularly in small, rural schools. The State of Colorado, for example, recently developed a criterion-referenced test, called the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP). It is an expensive, but very well designed test that measures student competency in the areas of math, writing, and reading, with scores generated through a team of raters rather than machine scored fill-in "bubbles."

Although the design of the test is well respected by our staff, its intended use by the State is to rate all schools according to student performance on that single measure. There are three problems that are immediately obvious. First, it only measures student competency in

three areas of student performance, while the state mandates that schools are, in fact, responsible for 12 areas of student performance, (and local school boards include additional standards of performance that reflect local values). Second, schools with very small enrollments, such as ours, yield insignificant data because the number of students is not sufficient to give an accurate statistical analysis. Third, relying on a single measure to evaluate the success of schools is a dangerous journey toward the politics of schooling and away from the meaningful assessment of learning.

As in other schools rooted in place-based instruction, our students have achieved learning goals that far exceed the "basics" of math, reading and writing. Equally important, our communities have benefited from the place-based projects that are flourishing at our schools. Although we appreciated the one measure that the state offered us for assessing student learning, clearly we were desperate for more comprehensive assessment of the depth and breadth of our work.

In March 2000, with 11 other Rural Trust network sites from across the nation, and under the consultation of staff members from Harvard University, we gathered in Omaha, Nebraska to tackle a task that turned out to be far more complex than any of us anticipated. We started by studying a draft of a rubric that had been created by the Rural Trust staff in consultation with the Harvard staff, based on the work that had been accomplished throughout Rural Trust sites.

The rubric identified nine principles with several identifying aspects of those

principles and four "levels of performance" that described how the work would look at different levels of development. We were asked to go back and spend some time at our sites to consider what could be included in a portfolio of evidence that would demonstrate where our sites might rate on those nine principles.

One of the most unique circumstances of the process, and one that was clearly ground-breaking was that the "experts" were not telling us how to assess our work. Rather, we were being invited into a partnership that included staff, students, and community members from our sites, as well as Harvard researchers and Rural Trust staff. We were embarking on a research project that engaged all the players in the learning process as "experts."

When we met again in Omaha in July 2000, each site shared their resultant "portfolios." There was so much evidence presented by each site that most of us required several suitcases to lug all of it with us. It was quickly clear to all of us that we had not yet learned how to select truly "rich" evidence, how to overcome the desire to "show off" our work, or how to sharpen our portfolios to focus on specific issues such as student learning, community contributions, or student voice.

For the 2000-2001 school year, the team tried a new approach. This time six of the original design team sites agreed to continue the work, and five new sites were added. We committed to quarterly national meetings, as well as ongoing work at the site level. The Rural Trust contracted with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to partner with us, in addition to the continued consultation with Harvard University. Our approach to the process was to first rebuild the rubric, with four "entries" identified as: 1) Student Learning and Contributions, 2) Community Learning and Contributions, 3) Deepening and Spreading the Work, and 4) Student Voice. Our team tackled the first three entries, leaving the fourth entry, student voice, to be developed in partnership with a group of Rural Trust students from across the nation.

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Once we built a draft rubric for the three entries, each site selected an entry that they wanted to focus on, and then worked with other sites that had selected that same entry. With the help of the ETS staff, we learned to put aside our fears of being misunderstood or judged by "outsiders," and turned our attention to studying evidence to carefully determine whether or not it truly offered the information necessary for indicating growth. At the same time, we revised the rubric constantly as we learned what made sense, what was left out, what was repeated, or what was unclear. Throughout the course of the year, we spent time at our sites with teams of students, staff and community members, analyzing the rubric, gathering evidence, and writing and rewriting narratives that would connect the evidence to the themes and aspects of the rubric. Then we gathered together at meeting sites around the nation (Albuquerque, New Orleans, Phoenix, and Denver) where we revised the rubrics for each entry, gave each other feedback on how to improve our portfolios, and shared our frustrations.

At the last meeting of that year, in Denver, we came together to analyze what we had learned in the final stage of our process, which was the presentation of our portfolios for formal review at the site level. This was a pivotal meeting for everyone involved in the team up to that point. We had spent a year or more developing a tool that would offer schools and communities an effective way to measure the impact of their work on student learning, on the community, and on the changing roles of everyone involved. We had opened ourselves to scrutiny within the team, and developed important networking relationships with one another. Many of our sites had begun disseminating the portfolio assessment tools to others.

As we shared the results of our work and our plans for further distribution, it became clear to everyone involved that our work had only begun. The Rural Trust and ETS staffs, which had originally intended to bring closure to the 2000-2001 design team and begin field

testing the rubric with an entirely new group of schools, made a change in plans. They decided instead to put their energy into supporting the existing team in its work to implement, improve, and circulate the newly developed assessment model.

Bringing our shared sense of enthusiasm and responsibility to take the work to the next level, the team met in October 2001 in North Carolina to strategize methods for distributing the model to other sites. We learned protocols to help

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facilitate the development of quality portfolios at new sites, shared the breadth of dissemination that we had already accomplished, and created a technological network for having electronic conversations about the implementation of the model.

We have already felt the effects of our work at the regional level all across the country. The Guffey School, along with a consortium of sister schools in Colorado, was funded by the Colorado Department of Education to develop and distribute a manual for teachers, students and community members to assist them in developing quality portfolios which will be shared in a statewide meeting in the spring of 2002. (The manual can be accessed through the consortium website at [www.ruralcharters.org](http://www.ruralcharters.org) and is linked with the Colorado Department of Education.)

Our Rural Trust neighbors to the south in Arizona include Navajo charter school communities that have used the portfolio model to assess the impact of place-based work on community connections. They are now partnering with

25 Native sites in Hawaii to implement the model. Their project coordinator, Dr. Mark Sorenson, explains: "The work we are doing with the local Navajo charter schools and the Native Hawaiian charter schools is built on the simple idea that there is within each of these communities tremendous knowledge about the natural world that is held by the elders and a tremendous need for the children to connect with the elders for the survival of the communities. The use of the rubrics as a tool or roadmap is important, because we begin the activities about Native science with the end in mind."

To the north of us, a project at the University of Wyoming called Coordinated Resource Management in the Classroom (see article p. 8) has 23 sites around the state that will be using Entry 1 of the portfolio model to assess student work, and then share their portfolios at a statewide meeting in February 2002.

There is no denying that the work is complex, time-consuming and fraught with frustration, not unlike any learning process. But for our small, rural, community-based schools it is a bright beacon of hope for students, staff and community members. The light from the beacon is shining, at last, on the depth and breadth of learning that happens within the context of community.

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## Feedback

Do you have any questions, comments or feedback? Something got you jazzed up? Think we should cover your story? Have an idea for us? Have a rural education need that we are not fulfilling? We greatly value your thoughts and opinions. Write to the Editor at the Rural School and Community Trust: 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006. Or e-mail: [editor@ruraledu.org](mailto:editor@ruraledu.org). We look forward to hearing from you.



## Where Does Place-Based Learning Fit In?

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10 and 11, Louisiana began a statewide accountability program that requires students to develop a conceptual understanding of subjects in the context of real-world applications. Without marked improvement in test scores, schools are subject to "corrective action," with continued and increased external oversight and control of the school until improvements are evident.

Knight Roddy, project coordinator of the East Feliciana Parish Schools Project Connect, believes that using place-based education is the most effective way of teaching the concepts students need to understand on the state tests. "My selling point to teachers, administrators and school board members is that place-based is such an efficient and effective vehicle for helping students learn these concepts, because it's meaningful to them."

One of his best selling points, however, is the district's 4th graders: the district's 4th grade passage rate of state science tests increased by 13 percentage points in one year.

In 2001, the passing average of the three elementary schools (Slaughter, Clinton and Jackson) 4th graders was the same as the state's: 85 percent. The passage rate in 2000 was 72 percent, 10 points lower than the state's average.

In the case of this parish, place-based had to be standards-based. According to Dr. Daisy Slan, the superintendent of East Feliciana schools, "Mr. Roddy took each standard required of the students and tailored it to resources in the community. He realized that our area had so many resources that would help teachers connect learning to their surroundings ... we couldn't have gotten to this point without his commitment and dedication."

"By doing hands-on activities, students don't just learn concepts, [they] remember them," said Roddy. "The activities are minds-on as well—we're teaching those concepts while enjoying the activity. In the research we have done, we have found students still remember months later what they did and what they saw in these place-based activities. That doesn't happen with normal curriculum. When [students] try to memorize something for a test, it has a shelf-life of an hour."



Photo courtesy of East Feliciana Parish Schools.

Roddy and Slan have seen improvements in other areas as well. Teachers are feeling more comfortable teaching science, in part because of Roddy's efforts to train teachers and encourage them to take advantage of Rural Trust resources. Teachers are moving into making learning more interdisciplinary and communicating with each other through team curriculum planning. "I have seen teachers talking to each other about how to work on standards across curricular areas," said Slan. Lastly, community partners are enjoying their involvement with the school and are excited about continuing their partnership.

One day, Roddy was working with students from Slaughter Elementary who

were conducting a plot study of the land around the school, a project started by a teacher who attended a workshop at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute. Students were actively identifying plants and flowers by using the field guides all by themselves, without teacher direction. Two weeks later, the students wrote a post-project essay covering what they had done and learned.

"It's so impressive to see them remembering what they did. To some it's surprising, but it's not really, because what they did was meaningful learning ... they are going to remember what has meaning to them," Roddy said.

Slan sees further proof that place-based education works for her district.

"We know it's working, quite simply because our state test scores have improved," she said.

## Vermont Rural Partnership, Vermont

### *A case of integrating place-based standards into statewide requirements*

In the small town of Peacham, Vermont (pop. 640), teachers meet no barriers in their quest to integrate place-

based education into their curriculum. Projects designed to involve community and sustain local land and history proceed with support from the community and state, in part because in performing these projects, teachers are helping to meet the cross-curriculum student standards of "sense of place" and "sustainability" laid out in Vermont's state learning standards.

What seems like a dream come true to place-based educators across the country—statewide, place-based standards—is a reality in Vermont, where a coalition of community members, educators and government representatives united to make those standards a part of state requirements.



*Courtesy of Peacham School.*

Vermont's story is a learning experience for anyone interested in introducing place-based standards into discussions of statewide requirements. In the mid '90s, the State Board of Education in Vermont began to create their framework of standards, using an inclusive approach that involved wide participation from community members and educators. The resulting integrated framework includes standards that address the community's expectations of a child's "vital results"—including communication, civic and social responsibility and healthy choices, and "fields of knowledge" that cover discipline-based standards.

Later in the process, when the framework was fine-tuned by subject-specific committees taking a serious look at possible areas of improvement, another

group of interested parties from a wide range of backgrounds formed separately to address what they saw as two missing standards. These proposed standards would address students' understanding of place, and also their understanding of environmental, economic, social and political sustainability.

The standards hit a barrier before acceptance, and it "wasn't the roadblock you would expect," according to Margaret MacLean, principal at Peacham School and Director of the Vermont Rural Partnership, a Rural Trust network site that is an alliance of 18 small schools and communities. "In Vermont, it was the superintendents, not the State Board of Education, who were the largest roadblock. They were standing up for the teachers who felt that

there were already enough standards to implement," she said.

Nevertheless, since the process included such broad public involvement from people of all sectors of society, it was clear that there was enough support to pass the standards. "The group pointed out that many teachers were already meeting the requirement ... teachers wouldn't have to create new lessons, but they would have to document what they were already doing in a different way," said MacLean.

The two new standards were passed about 18 months ago, and are now a part of the personal development and civic/social responsibility standards in the vital results section of the state's standards

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document. Indeed, implementing place-based projects comes with state support, and a sense of community ownership, thanks to the inclusive process that brought those standards to fruition. Joseph Kiefer of Food Works and member of VRP suggests that the collaborative approach Vermont used can be mimicked elsewhere. "It's a grassroots approach ... it's our participant democracy at work. Collaboration is key, cooperation essential," he said.

Place-based educators also find room for alternative assessment practices in Vermont. The state requires districts to develop a comprehensive assessment plan in partnership with the state test-

At Peacham School and other schools involved with VRP, projects forge ahead and are held up as models of how these standards enhance learning and involve young people in the preservation of Vermont's small communities.

"Many people advocated for these standards because they believed they were important to the future of our state," said MacLean.

## Coordinated Resource Management in the Classroom, Wyoming

### *A case of using place-based in response to educators' needs*

In a state with approximately five people per square mile, and more than 9,000 farms and ranches that average

3,742 acres in size, the sustainability of Wyoming's land and ecological diversity is everyone's business. Ranchers, government agency representatives, environmentalists and concerned citizens

employ consensus-building groups to make decisions about the use and management of the land and its natural resources, by using the state's Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) program. By taking part in these groups, people of differing interests and opinions use logical reasoning and research to communicate their ideas and arrive at an acceptable solution for all involved.

Recognizing the educational potential of the CRM process, Pete Ellsworth, a professor at the University of Wyoming, worked with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture and the Institute for Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming to bring CRM into the classroom. He and his wife Judy, also a professor at the University, saw not only a way to teach students how to deal with complex, real-life issues; they also saw ways to tie their project into numerous state standards

and provide teachers with an activity-based curriculum.

Student passage of Wyoming's state testing in grades 4, 8 and 11 in literacy and math is not required in order to graduate or be promoted to the next grade. The onus is on individual districts to provide a "body of evidence" that students are meeting standards in all areas, by using an assessment system chosen by the district. That can involve just about any means of assessment, including standardized tests and class grades.

In answer to districts that wanted activity-based projects to meet state standards, the Wyoming Activities Consortium was formed through the Wyoming Department of Education. "This consortium of over half of the school districts was asking for alternatives to standardized and objective testing as a way of meeting the requirement," according to Ellsworth. Composed of approximately 110 educators, the consortium works to identify activities in various disciplines that districts can use as evidence that students have satisfied state standards.

One such project adapted by the consortium is the Ellsworths' project, CRM in the Classroom. The Ellsworths plugged their program into the consortium's listing of activities in order to structure it and make linking it to standards easy for teachers. "The relationship between the activities and standards has been recognized by the state, so using this framework is easy for teachers ... they can just sit down with this project and check off the standards addressed," said Ellsworth.

This December, the Sweetwater County School District will join the more than 20 other districts that have integrated this project into the curriculum. In the past, the district hosted conversations between ranchers and teachers in order for the two groups to exchange viewpoints; it is also an opportunity for teachers to learn ranching and land-use instructional strategies for use in the classroom. With this partnership between educators and ranchers in mind, the district chose to begin the CRM in the Classroom program in a wide range of grades.

Connie Nerby is a teacher on special assignment in the district. "There are

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ing given in grades 2, 4, 8 and 10. At Peacham School, teachers tackle this requirement by developing an individual assessment for each child.

"We have no challenges in terms of choosing to use place-based curriculum, because we can use and assess [it] in our own way. We're setting the agenda for that through our local assessment plan," said MacLean.

However, inclusion in state standards is just the beginning for members of VRP, who are intent on using the two standards as a stepping stone to making the connections between learning and the community embedded in all curriculum. Being a part of the standards is just a "toe hold" according to Kiefer. "Now it's time to 'up the ante' and move beyond occasional place-based curriculum and have it completely embedded into the pedagogy of all of our classes. Toward that bigger step, we have a lot left to do," he said.





Photos courtesy  
of Niobrara  
County #1  
District in  
Lusk, Wyoming



ranchers who see [projects like these] as their only real survival piece," notes Nerby. "They see it as a way to garner support by opening up their lifestyles and sharing them with students. It's to their benefit to have a public that is educated about the realities and the obstacles of ranching."

The project benefits students and schools as well. Through their involvement with the CRM process, students gain a comprehensive set of skills covering science, economics, math, history, social studies and language arts. Schools gain a powerful tool to meet state standards.

The project involves students in either existent CRM teams or perhaps a school's simulated group. Generally, students research and write a comprehensive case study of a piece of land. The group conducts a thorough study of the site, including conducting an inventory of the land and its components and learning the viewpoints of others who are interested in the future use of the land. Students then use a consensus-based decision making process to reach an agreement on a land management plan. The group writes a report on their findings and designs a data collection and analysis plan to monitor the implementation of the management plan. In some projects, students are active participants in the CRM team, and therefore take part in all of the decision-making done by the group.

Addressing state standards is more manageable

when schools integrate this project into their curriculum. And, the Ellsworths and others will soon have a means of assessing the work through their participation on the Rural Trust portfolio design team. "Aligning activities like ours with the standards is not difficult. The challenge comes in documenting student learning with regards to addressing those standards," said Ellsworth.

Their involvement with the Rural Trust team will provide them with the proper tools to address this work. "Evaluating our efforts with this program will allow us to use CRM as evidence that kids are meeting our state standards," said Nerby.

### The Case for Using Place-Based

"When learning is grounded in the local community, [students] learn, they are motivated, they score well on tests, behavior problems decrease," said Vermont's Kiefer. He points to *Closing the Achievement Gap: Using the Environment*

as an *Integrating Context for Learning* from the State Education and Environment Roundtable, as his evidence.

In their research, authors Leiberman and Hoody define "environment as an integrating context for learning" (EIC) as education that uses "a school's surroundings and community as a framework within which students can construct their own learning, guided by teachers and administrators." The researchers found that students involved in EIC programs "earn higher grades and score better in reading, writing and math." Other benefits include: "reduced discipline and classroom management problems, increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning, and greater pride and ownership in accomplishments."

"Place-based is just an effective way to learn," notes Louisiana's Roddy. And as sites in Wyoming, Louisiana and Vermont have shown, it's also an effective way to creatively teach students what they need to know to meet state standards and prepare for assessment.



Photo courtesy of Niobrara County #1 District in Lusk, Wyoming.

You can contact Knight Roddy at [krodgy@effsb.k12.la.us](mailto:krodgy@effsb.k12.la.us); Margaret MacLean at [margaret.maclea@ruraledu.org](mailto:margaret.maclea@ruraledu.org); and Peter Ellsworth at [peterc@uwyo.edu](mailto:peterc@uwyo.edu) for more information on the programs in Louisiana, Vermont and Wyoming.

A copy of *Standards in Public Schools: A Policy Statement of the Rural School and Community Trust* is available at [www.ruraledu.org/standards.pdf](http://www.ruraledu.org/standards.pdf).

## Youth Council

# There's More to Education than Test Scores

By Kelsey Harnist

Standards and assessment are inherent parts of our existence as human beings. Truly, not a day can pass without someone measuring and critiquing our achievements or failures, however large or small they may be. From grades and tests in school, performance evaluations at work, and judgments socially, they are impossible to escape. Americans seem to thrive on the idea of quantification; we yearn to have our actions validated. It gives us a sense of accomplishment to know that other people think well of what we have done.

Beginning in the 20th century with the SAT (Standard Aptitude Test), originally intended to give minority students equal opportunity in the college admission process, standardized tests have become an integral part of education in the United States. Every student is familiar with them: days are taken out of the regular schedule of classes, passages are read, problems are solved, and endless rows of "bubbles" are filled in. Six months later, an envelope arrives in the mail, notifying John Doe of his scores. The envelope is placed in a bag, maybe a box, and is promptly forgotten, right? That may be about to change. The use of standardized tests as a measurement not just of a student's success, but now of a school's success, is becoming much more prevalent; in many states, the amount of funding a school receives is directly proportional to the school's performance on such exams.

As the proliferation of standardized tests continues, school districts are beginning to employ them in "high stakes" situations. Instead of trivia to be observed and then disregarded, test scores may now determine whether a student attends summer school, moves on to the next grade, and, most importantly, if a student graduates from high school.

Mandatory tests are also used as a lens to evaluate the impact of state standards. So far, 29 states have adopted systems revolving around the high-stakes concept, while several others have it on their agendas.

What are the benefits of these tests? According to their proponents, tests have many benefits. For one, they are an excellent device for parents to see how their child is doing in relation to students around the state and the nation. They force schools to focus on basic skills, such as reading and writing, which, oddly enough, can be neglected. Finally, the exams can be used as a tool to chart the progress of individual students and identify areas where improvement is needed.

In spite of all this, response to the use of high-stakes tests among students has been less than enthusiastic.

In California, the High School Exit Exam has been called everything from "worthless," to "ridiculous," to "a total waste of time." Indeed, over fifty percent of the state's freshmen passed the Exam, yet they are required to take it again in their sophomore, junior, and senior years. In Texas, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills brought with it problems much more serious than boredom. Says Maria Hernandez, a resident of and student in the Lone Star State: "Teachers have begun teaching to the TAAS. Teachers teach only what is needed to pass or master the exam and not much else." If instructors feel pressured to have their pupils succeed on such exams, it is because their students' performance often dictates the amount of monetary support given to the school, which in turn affects the quality of resources teachers have on hand. The lack of resources can be seriously detrimental to the learning process, a side effect of the test its creators certainly did not intend. If students are succeeding simply

because they have been taught to the test, however, that means they are missing out on everything besides basic skills. That is quite a thin line to walk between real failure and false progress.

Are there alternative ways to measure student achievement? Educators in Vermont think so. In Vermont, students prepare portfolios of their best work in math and English that include essays concerning how the pieces were chosen and, in math, how the student arrived at the solution. Professionally trained teachers then examine the portfolios in order to determine how well they meet the state standards. Cara Cookson, a former student in Cabot, Vermont, says: "I think [portfolios are] a much more fair system of assessing student work. The teacher doesn't just see what answer the student gets, or what the student wrote, but what thought processes he or she used to get there." In Guffey, Colorado, an elementary school has taken a much more radical approach. Fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-graders, are directly involved in creating standards and assessment tools; the students write proposals regarding what they should be held accountable for and how their achievements should be measured, as well as participating in the hiring of teachers. Such hands-on student involvement is extremely rare; nevertheless, the program has reportedly been very successful.

Standardized tests are obviously not the only way to assess student performance, but for the moment, the momentum seems to favor test scores as the sole indicator of student success. But can tests, particularly high-stakes tests, really measure all of our abilities—or are they a "quick fix" that only captures students' skill and drill knowledge and robs teachers of flexibility in their instruction, making the classroom a duller place? Will tests prove viable in the long run when used as the single instrument to judge student learning? Only time and a few million darkened circles will tell.

*Kelsey Harnist is junior at Anderson Valley High School in Boonville, California. He is a founding member of the National Youth Council of the Rural School and Community Trust.*

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## Rural Trust Video Now Available

The Rural Trust has a new video available, *Communities and Schools: Getting Better Together*. Using the voices of students, teachers, and community members, the video shows how place-based education is helping small rural schools and the communities they serve improve teaching, learning and community life.

This video is designed to show those who may not be familiar with place-based education why community involvement is so critical to school success, and how kids can do incredible things when their academic learning is based on identifying community needs and solving real-life problems.

To order send a \$20 check (includes shipping) payable to the "Rural School and Community Trust" to: Rural Trust Video, 1825 K Street, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006.

The video is only one of many resources available from the Rural Trust. Some are printed reports; many are available in both printed form and online. For a listing, go to the Rural Trust website at [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org), and click on Publications.







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## Publications of Note

### 14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making

From Youth on Board

It just makes sense. Young people should be involved in the decisions that affect their lives. They benefit.

Organizations benefit. And so does the community. This comprehensive guide to youth involvement is a logical starting point for preparing young people to take ownership of their communities. It includes guidelines, worksheets, tips, a resource directory and stories from the street (all designed to help young people and

adults work together to improve their communities.) The book is \$25. Go to [www.youthonboard.org](http://www.youthonboard.org) or call (617) 623-9900, ext. 1242 for ordering information. Also check out their follow-up book, *Youth on Board: Why and How to Involve Youth in Organizational Decision-Making*.

### Writing to Make a Difference: Classroom Projects for Community Change

Edited by Chris Benson and Scott Christian with Walter H. Gooch and Dixie Goswami

With chapters written by teachers, this book describes how to get students involved in action research and in writing about issues that are important to them and their communities. The projects show teachers how to engage their students while also teaching basic skills that appear in educational stan-

dards and assessment frameworks. Order it through Columbia's Teachers College Press at <http://store.tcpress.com/0807741868.shtml>. The book is \$21.95 in paperback.

### Educator's Guide to Program Development in Natural Resources: Education as a Community Resource

By Jon Yoder and Neal Maine

This manual assists educators in developing natural resources programs that use ecosystem-based management principles and concepts to teach ecological sustainability, and are delivered through a community-based approach to education. This report is available free through the Northwest Center for Sustainable Resources. To order, contact Lauren Elliano at (503) 399-5270 or by e-mail at [elll@chemeketa.edu](mailto:elll@chemeketa.edu).

*If you would like your publication to be considered for Publications of Note, please send the book, along with ordering information, to: Editor, Rural Trust, 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006.*